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CASTLE FOAM;

OR,

THE HEIR OF MEERSCHAUM.

A RUSSIAN STORY.

BY

H. W. FRENCH,
AUTHOR OF "ART IN CONNECTICUT," ETC.

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THE TRIBUTE

IS FAR TOO TRIVIAL, YET SO MUCH AS FRIENDLY

CRITICISM SHALL FIND TO FAVOR IN

"CASTLE FOAM," IS

DEDICATED TO MY WIFE.

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CASTLE FOAM.

PART I.

"For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled.
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build."

CASTLE FOAM.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HEART OF HINDOOSTAN.

"Who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong?
Who feedeth the hungry?
The Lord helpeth them that are fallen.
As for the way of the ungodly,
He turneth it upside down."

THESE words from the psalter, for the 30th day of the month, with morning prayer, were read by the captain to a few of us gathered upon the steamer-deck, one Sunday morning not very long ago. We were thirteen days out from Suez, and that mysterious coast-line to the north of Bombay clouded the beryl horizon like a Tyrian mist on the water. Destiny forced this formula upon my mind as a sort of text, and thereupon Fate began at once to preach a remarkable sermon.

How ominously some little things, that are destined by and by to become great, fix themselves upon the mind without apparent rhyme or reason! — coming events casting shadows before! Almost unconsciously, and half aloud, I was repeating the refrain, when twilight darkened about us, hiding the nearing hills. A fellow-passenger sprang to a seat beside

me on the rail, replying, "The Book says it; but it seems like mockery, in a land where all the workers of iniquity do flourish."

It was not till yesterday, as one might say, that I realized what force there was for his skepticism. Yet that there must have been a cause was evident, for he was not that sort of man to whom one looks for far-fetched levity, though a genial, good fellow withal. It is not often that one meets a man whose faults are but dust on a diamond; he, however, even added to so much perfection all that could have made him more attractive — an indefinite mingling of mystery.

We were two of a party of five, all strangers to the others when we left Suez, bound northward, upon landing, to spend the last month of the warm season upon the highland hunting-grounds. This man was, by us all, acknowledged the prodigy of the party — a sort of human-deity, we almost thought, though even his nationality was a mystery. But never mind him now; he must disappear for a long time to come.

Again those words came back to me! this time in the heart of Hindoostan. Almost in the center of India, quite in the center religionwise, there is a city; not so much of a city then as now; but more or less, we five were waiting there to make ourselves ready for the hunt. The houses were low, very low, and not many of them. The narrow streets were very narrow, and there were no wide ones. They started with nothing, and wound away — nowhere. The walls were of sun-baked mud, primitive stucco-work, brown as a russet rind before the March thaw tints it with yellow. Copper-skinned Hindoos sat in the door-

ways — those very low doorways. Olive-brown babies were thick in the narrow streets; and the babies were covered with flies, with no one to brush them off. There were one-and-fifty mosques and temples, low like the houses, with golden domes and marble minarets. And there were hosts of idols there — all sorts and sizes of them; wonderful gods in that mythic triangle! And where the city ended, upon its eastern side, and the limitless fields began, there stood the dak bungalow, the Anglo-Indian post-station. And that was *Allah-Abad*, "City of God," then! at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna, and that mysterious river flowing there invisibly, directly from the throne of Brahma. Since then the English railways have made of it a city of their great god Commerce!

It was cool and right comfortable, lying upon a bamboo divan on the broad veranda of that bungalow, fanned by a free swinging punka. I had almost dozed, or slept, for an hour, I hardly know, when roused by the tramp of horses' feet. A stranger approached the bungalow. He was almost a giant. He might have been one of the race whom Frey saw from the Pisgah of Hindoo mythology. He rode a royal black Arab, and a servant followed on one hardly less beautiful. He dismounted, and stepped upon the veranda. His dress was that of a Hindoo, and he spoke to his servant as though it were his mother-tongue. But there was that contradiction in his bearing, which was refined and proud, that unmistakably declared it no more at least than foster-mother. His hair, that fell beneath his turban, was white as snow, and a long white beard reached

almost to his girdle. Over his shoulder was thrown a long-barreled and highly ornamented gun, and a Damascus blade hung beside him. A dark and independent eye, and dignified satisfaction in each motion, made an object of self-assurance in the might of his own strength, sufficient to draw me instantly from the drowses of dreamland. I lay and looked at him, till, calling the keeper of the bungalow, he gave an order that I could not understand, and lighting a cheroot, threw himself upon the divan opposite. Then I took refuge in that blandly confidential question that is repeated so many thousand times by every American tourist, without the slightest expectation of an affirmative reply.

"Do you speak English?" I asked.

"Sometimes," said he, in a clear Anglo-Saxon that startled me.

"You are an Englishman?" I went on, in the approved formula.

"Not at all," said he. "It is spoken so much in India, of late, that every bestial coolie of Bengal has more or less idea of what it is to speak it."

"French, or German?" I continued, according to the best and most orderly catechism.

"Neither," he replied in French; "but the tongue of either is better than English."

Dropping into a language that pleased him, I asked if the furnace-heat of India was never annoying. He seemed to enjoy it. In fact, he did enjoy it; for he almost smiled as he replied with a vigorous "Never!" and added:

"Twenty years ago they told me that ten years of this would shrivel even Satan to a cinder! But, on

my oath, he has grown stronger with every Englishman arriving."

He hated the English, there was no doubt of that, and so did I. It was a bond of fellowship, and soon led to another. It transpired that the stranger had long hunted over the plains toward which we were slowly progressing, and readily consented to join our party with his invaluable information. An hour later he set out for Cawnpore, there to secure our needful accoutrements. At sunset we followed him in one of the old-time Hindoo carts, — two wheels, no springs, no cushions, — drawn by the sacred Maltese bullocks, jogging at a slow dog-trot.

We rumbled and jolted over the plain. Far away weird figures, like white elves and genii, seemed reeling about in the moonlight, in grotesque war-dances. Now and then the silver light flashed on the broad wings of a flamingo, startled from its midnight hiding-place among the marsh-bogs.

And on the continuance of that hunting-trip hangs the tale, be it a sermon or what not, dating backward for its beginning something over half a century, and far away from India, in the new capital of Russia.

CHAPTER II.

THE LION IN HIS LAIR.

IT was just as dark a night as one could wish for any kind of villainy. Everything was dark in Russia, and the days of Paul the Reckless were numbered. No one knew precisely what the number was, for as yet the spoken conspiracies had only singled out the Lord Chief Adjutant, thinking that a draught upon his warm blood would act to jog the elbow of the Tzar, and turn him toward his duty. But they were numbered nevertheless, and, as every one knows, the days in Russia, as well as the nights, were very dark, after Paul I. could have counted his remaining months of life upon his fingers. Many superstitious souls, as the annals show, actually believed that the sun became darkened, and that the moon did not give her light, so dark, so very dark was everything in Russia.

It was a dismal winter night, as well as dark, and the old man with his scythe, and his hour-glass nearly spent, tottered toward the threshold with "1800" on his well-filled pack. A stripling, nothing more or less, a youth in the state of adolescence, walked timidly, yet rather boldly considering the occasion, down one of those streets of St. Petersburg that even to-day seem built on purpose for conspirators;

they are so full of crooks and turns, with houses standing boldly upon the street and houses set far back from the pavement, houses even built across the street, going up on one side and coming down on the other, and houses guarded by heavy and strong fences. The corners seem too dark for the lamps to light them, the windings too intricate for eyes to watch them. They were very carefully watched, nevertheless, by a wonderfully organized army of men whom no one knew but their officers, who never knew each other, and rarely knew their officers, and who were themselves as much in danger of shipment to Siberia as any they were watching, being themselves kept carefully under guard. All of this, and much more, to preserve the life and position of one man, and that man an inordinate fool!

The young man, referred to above, had not an idea as to where he was going, except that by following certain specific directions he would find a friend of whose assistance he stood much in need. There was no cause for him to suspect or fear that he trod on treacherous ground, for many of the nobility lived on that same street, and the guilty and innocent alike guarded their homes in those dark days, till few went or came anywhere in St. Petersburg after dark, and off the main thoroughfares, who did not do it by the interchange of signs and passwords.

Reaching a certain point, the youth stopped suddenly, and listened. All was still. He crossed the street and listened. He walked slowly until he came to a place where three gates met upon the street, opening into paths leading toward mansions that seemed widely separated. Again he was silent.

Then placing his hand on the latch, he rapped with his heel upon a rough slab in the pavement, but only once. Suddenly, as he expected, the latch dropped, the gate opened, and he entered. It swung together, and closed behind him with a suggestive click. He followed the path more by the sense of feeling than by sight, through a dark, cold garden, where the pines snapped and the wind sighed, and nothing but shadows were visible.

While he slowly advances, shivering, down the path, we may do well to look at him. He is eighteen, no more than that, straight, tall, and strong. He is a soldier, and has just returned from the campaign of the Allies against the French republic. Naturally he seeks promotion. He comes to meet an influential general, under whom he has served, who has promised him a guaranty and recommendation to present to the council. How he has dreamed of, and longed for, and fought for, and waited, anxiously waited for that promotion, only a soldier can appreciate. Now it is just before him — if he can find the way. It seemed a little doubtful for a time, but suddenly that peculiar impression of the atmosphere that gives the blind a sensation as true as sight, forced his eyes from the path he had been following, and he found himself almost at odds with the gloomy wall of one of the mansions. He felt with his hand to see if he had kept the path : it was still beneath his feet. He felt of the wall before him. Unmistakably the path ended there. But where was the door? There was no sign of it. It was not impossible, however, that he might still be right. He gave the signal, and was scarcely surprised when, an instant later, a faint glimmer of

light shone through a small, round hole, a little to one side of him. Nevertheless, in the momentary embarrassment he had almost put his mouth to the hole, and inquired, "Is the Count von Kramareff within?" when he recalled the fact that here he was to present his own card with the card of the man who had invited him, concealed in his handkerchief. They were all ready, and went through the little hole an instant later. A clammy, cold hand touched the warm fingers of the young soldier, and caused him to start with fear.

Then the hole closed up again, and an uncertain sound seemed to indicate that a door was opening. He put out his hand again. There was nothing whatever there this time. He attempted to speak, but the first husky grating of his voice reminded him that he was not to utter a sound, but simply to follow where he should be led. He entered. The door closed behind him, and was barred and bolted; how and by whom, he would have been glad to know, for he began to recall the ugly ways in which arrests were often made, with no questions asked at this end, and Siberia at the other end. Beads of cold perspiration trickled down from under his hatband. It was a heavy hat. He took it off. The air that struck his forehead was damp and cold. There was an evil odor about him. He began to tremble slightly, and to wish himself somewhere else. His first impulse was to fly. Then his sleeve was pulled by some one. Should he choke him, whoever he was? He thought so, and had almost made the will a deed, when he determined upon the better part of valor, and followed the invitation to move on. The hall seemed inter-

minable as he slowly walked along behind the faint tapping of the feet of his guide upon the floor; but it came to an end. The footsteps ceased. He stood still. Three solemn raps sounded. Chilling and blood-curdling! It was only an Open Sesame! Suddenly a dazzling light flashed through an opening door. The young soldier felt a strong arm behind him, but he was blinded by the light. The arm forced him forward. The door closed behind him, and he heard the bolts swing. Was he a prisoner? It was a gorgeous dungeon if he were. The room was furnished in Oriental magnificence. Not a window or another door broke the smooth walls of the large salon; but Moorish tapestry and Turkish arabesque left no room for either. Nor had the soldier time to wonder how the fresh air entered the apartment — there was surely no lack of it — or what mysterious problems there might be behind those costly hangings. Lights flashed in each of a line of crystal chandeliers, delicately wrought by Persian workmen. A fire blazed on a hearth at one end of the salon, its red glow creeping down the room like finger-points of blood, touching the polished black marble statues of Mors upon one side the fireplace, and Pluto on the other, till they seemed dripping with purple gore. Before the fire stood a small marble table, with paper and writing-materials upon it. Beside the table sat a man upon a Turkish ottoman, his feet resting in deep indentations in an Indian rug. His head lay heavily upon his hand, and white locks straggled through his fingers. With a sigh of true relief the young soldier recognized the influential general, the Count von Kramareff.

Count von Kramareff, too, was fresh from the bloody fields of the Allies, where he had shared the tent and dangers of the reckless, merciless Suwarrow — that fearful leader, who could leap from his bed at midnight, be drenched with water, and ride naked through his camp in the dead of winter weather, and return to sleep upon the ground, covered only by a rough horse-blanket. Directly after the withdrawal of the Russians from the allied armies, while Suwarrow, driven mad by his defeats, was dying the slow death that a madman dies, his brother general had fallen heir to the estates and the title of the Count von Kramareff, and left the army to take a very vigorous part in politics at home.

The white head by the fire was raised as the door closed, and the young soldier, bowing very low, said, "I am come, my lord, Count von Kramareff."

"Yes, yes. And you are none too early," said the count, speaking rapidly. "Stand here! We have to speak with you. A matter of grave importance demands our thoughts to-night."

The young soldier, blushing and bungling as he went, made his way to the position indicated, and stood like a picket on guard. The count continued:

"Have you anything to show or offer why I should do this thing for you?"

The soldier started, almost as though he had been shot.

"No, sire," he gasped. "No, my lord, Count von Kramareff. I told you I had nothing but what you see. But my gratitude shall seek to serve you, sire."

Then he blushed purple, and fingered the buttons

upon his coat as though suffocating, and longing for a little looseness about his throat.

"You talk well," said the count, without looking up again; "we shall soon see how much you mean by it. Look here!" He laid his hand heavily upon a sheet of paper upon which he had been writing, and his face had a worn, weary look, in spite of the excitement flashing in his eyes. "Your letter is ready; read it, and say if you are satisfied!"

The young man tried in vain to read. His eyes were too full of lovely pictures. The words seemed unintelligibly jumbled, like soldiers after a battle. He knew what the nature of it all must be, and feeling supremely grateful and happy, endeavored in an extraordinarily left-handed way to give words to his sentiments as he pretended to have finished reading the letter, without knowing a single sentence of what it contained.

"Then I will sign it," said the count. He took the paper, and continued speaking while slowly preparing for, and writing his name. And all the while that ominous, gory gleam flashed from the shining sides of Mors and Pluto by the fire.

"Do you remember," said the count, "where Schiller makes Gordon say to Butler, 'Come, friend, be noble-minded. Our own heart, and not other men's opinions, forms our true honor'?" He did not wait to learn if the soldier really remembered it or not, but continued: "You may have heard that I am of the anti-Olendorff way of thinking in Petersburg."

"No, sir! No, my lord, Count von Kramareff!" the young man shouted with as much gusto as though he had been denying a murder charge. But the count

did not hear him, if one might judge from the calm way in which he continued: "We lay at the door of the Royal Adjutant Lord Olendorff these grinding, frivolous laws that are ruining Russia. He turns our sovereign about as the helmsman his ship. He — Ha! I have blotted the paper! But here is a copy, quite the same. I will sign this one." He threw the injured sheet upon the floor, carefully wrote his name, pushed it one side to dry, and went on with his discourse.

"He is an alien! His Roman Catholicism has brought about the friendship of the Tzar for France! In fact, it has come to this, that to drive him from life altogether is the only way to free ourselves from his tyranny and our country from his curse. It is the only way to give the bastard son of Catherine and Sottikoff a chance to show if he can be an emperor! He has suppressed our schools, forbidden the possession of a foreign book, driven away all foreigners but the royal French; made Russia lie in mire before his throne, while he uses her to clean his boots upon."

The young man had been wandering away to the land of gilded stripes and gaudy epaulets, and was brought up "all standing," as the good country people say, when the count planted his clinched fist fiercely upon the table, and exclaimed: "The villain must die! He will leave the council at midnight to-night, and drive down the Prospect to his palace. Four men are now waiting at the eastern end of Admiralty Square. Join them and lead them on to victory! Here is your letter! See, I have signed it. Staked my good name to the Tzar as a surety of your being

a good officer. In return I ask your gratitude to act, not for *me*, but for your country." From half a blow at the start, the old ex-general's fury had carried him up to a thorough tornado at the close, and now his voice dropped nearly an octave as he added, much more deliberately, "You understand me, and will do it."

But he was a bit too confident. The thunderbolt found the young man suddenly transformed to a rock, where a gentle "Please, my boy, will you do this?" would have made him weak as water, and blushing as a rose.

"What!" he exclaimed, when the force in its full magnitude became apparent. "Murder the adjutant in cold blood! become a hired butcher! a paid man-killer! No, sire! No, my lord, Count von Kramareff! Not, were I therefor to be the Royal Adjutant in his stead!"

"A soft answer turneth away wrath;" but the count, swelling full of authority, the ashes of age like red coals again upon his cheeks, thundered in return, "Young man, Count Kramareff commands it!"

The fire was started. The wind but fanned the flame. Trembling with the energy of the moment, the youth replied, "And this poor private soldier refuses to obey!"

"Ha!" roared the old man, stamping the floor in his fury. "Then get your promotion if you can, opposed by Kramareff;" and tearing the letter, he threw it on the floor.

"I will," cried the boy again, quite beyond his own control, — "I will save the life of Olendorff!"

"You'll die where you are!" shouted Count Kra-

mareff, at a white heat; and, grasping his sword, he hurled it over his head to strike the fatal blow.

Perhaps it was the evil influence of some furious fiend; more likely the instinct of self-preservation; like a flash of light his dagger-blade gleamed in the young soldier's hand. An instant — a leap — a sudden thrust. The dagger was dripping and red. The sword had fallen behind Count Kramareff. The fire-blood poured in torrents down the black marble sides of the Mors and the Pluto. It was only a moment, a finger-breadth of time, yet a towering peak in the mountains of life. From a hopeful and promising youth, as the world goes, it made of him a cowardly, cringing murderer. He was hurled over that mountain, dragged across that gulf, by the will of an inexorable destiny. Could he have prevented it?

A heavy, lifeless "thud," as without a groan the body of the Count von Kramareff struck the floor, marked the short interim, and all was over.

"What have I done?" groaned the soldier, burying his face in his hands and trembling like an aspen-leaf. "I would not be the hired assassin of my country's foe, but am the murderer of my own best friend!"

Again self-preservation took possession of him, and he began to look about for some means of escape. He dared not face the body on the floor. He had looked just near enough to see two horribly staring eyes fixed on him, and a pool of blood collected on the floor. He never saw the face of the Count von Kramareff again except as a ghostly phantom haunting many an hour.

Not high nor low about that room was there a sign

of anything less solid than the walls of Cheops on the Nile. He aimlessly wandered up and down the room, with face averted, in a vain hope of finding some means of escape.

"Great God! what is that?" he gasped, falling heavily against the tapestry, as the first of three solemn raps sounded upon the great door through which he had entered. As his eye ran helplessly down toward the great door, a sheet of the tapestry intervening surely moved from some cause or other; it gave the drowning man a straw. With the energy of despair he reached the spot. A secret door! half open! The third rap sounded like the click of a muffled gunlock. The great door opened. Whoever entered found the body of the Count von Kramareff lying on his sword — alone!

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT ACROSS THE TRACK.

FIVE years wended their way off of this little world, with the monotony of the seasons, and sunrise and sunset, and still the guilty or not guilty soldier went in and out of the barracks as before, with his head still fast upon his shoulders, only that now it rested between two epaulets. Only an ugly nightmare kept guard like a sentinel over him, and from long watching with its victim it had grown gray in the service and even more hideous.

The Royal Adjutant was attacked upon that eventful night, but a screw was loose, for the attack was unsuccessful. It was, of course, upon the same night that the Count von Kramareff was carried to his home, mortally wounded. He had just time to give his blessing to his only child, a baby girl, when the old man with the hour-glass called for him, and counted one more in his harvest that was so nearly garnered.

Both of these events were tolerably startling, and each traveled about the capital as fast as the other. In fact, they went hand-in-hand from mouth to mouth, and the most natural result in the world was, that every one believed, or appeared to believe, that Count von Kramareff had himself attempted the assassination and had been killed by Lord Olendorff. Those

who knew better dared not deny it. Those who did not know, did not, for mercy's sake, dare to lift the mysterious veil; and there the whole matter dropped.

The epaulets, too, were a mystery to the young soldier. Instead of being beheaded, or exiled to Siberia, he had been promoted, step by step, in marvelously quick succession. The assassination of the Tzar himself, which occurred on the night of the 23d of March following the murder, had given him an opportunity to hold a ready sword, which had been referred to at each promotion, as though it had been something much greater than it really was. Still he was forever looking for the block upon which he was to stumble.

Under Paul's eldest son, Alexander, Russia throughout saw better times. Among other reliefs, the officers were allowed to attend late dinners, which freedom they indulged in to a degree that seemed likely to make up for any past neglect. The murderer of the Count von Kramareff — he called himself, to himself, even in his sleep, a murderer — had returned to his room late one night from one of these dinners. His servant brought in a card, informing him that the gentleman had been waiting three hours and wanted to speak with him.

"It is late," said the officer gruffly, vainly endeavoring to recall the owner of the name on the card, and trembling withal, as it had become his second nature to tremble at everything at all out of the common course. "I am tired," he continued. "See what he wants to say, and bring me word. Now go!"

The servant had no more than turned to obey,

when the man himself appeared. He was a small, well-favored, smiling and bowing specimen of humanity, nothing at all to tremble before, and his apology was simple enough.

"The servant did not — er — did not deliver the message as a well-regulated servant should. I — er — I feared he would not, so I came myself; for I said that I would *see* the officer, not speak."

"Possible!" said the soldier, with a little of scorn that he was sorry for afterward. "I do not remember to have met — "

"Do not mention it," interrupted the stranger. "You do not recognize me — do not recognize. In fact, I did not suppose you would;" and he hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves. It was a queer, indefinable expression that would seem to indicate that he knew something worth knowing, or meant more than he said, or was withal more of a man or more of a fool than one took him to be.

The soldier was at a loss whether to tremble or be angry, but adding a little of both to his reply, he said, "A fool to wait for three hours to see a man you never met. What is your business?"

"H'm," observed the stranger. "So I've offended you already. Who said I'd never met you? Who did, lied. I have met you often, and know you well; and knowing you, know you have something to be thankful to me for."

There was little time for the soldier to reflect upon the situation. He must evidently either be horribly frightened or thoroughly angry with this man. He

chose the latter for outward appearance, but a guilty conscience planted the former in his heart.

"I thankful! and to you!" he exclaimed, throwing his cap impatiently into the corner. "Well, come; here is a rouble and my thanks, and there the door. Now go!"

"I will go in *two minutes*," the stranger said, holding up two fingers emphatically. "I will go to the door, and you will call me back again." He leaned over the table, eying the young officer. "The night was dark. The hall was black; but when (he rapped three times on the table) sounded, the door opened into a room that was dazzlingly bright." He waited a moment, like a cat watching a mouse she has bitten and thrown away; then, blandly smiling, said, "My two minutes are expended, and I go," and turned toward the door.

There was all the tragedy he could have desired in the effect of his little drama. The officer was wilted like a flower in a furnace, and had almost let the stranger go, when, summoning a little breath, he called after him: "Stay, sir, stay! How did you know?"

The little man turned back again, as smiling and bowing as when he first entered, observing, "I thought you would." He seated himself again and went on: "I led you in. I let you out. You thought you got out by yourself; but it would have been impossible had I not unbolted the door at the end of the secret passage before you reached it, and unlocked the gate before you found it."

"Thanks," muttered the officer. His voice was spiced, however, with much more of irony than gratitude.

"Never mind," replied the little man. "It was — er — yes, something else that I referred to."

"What?" The hot-blooded young officer was wonderfully subdued at last.

"H'm. I'll tell you. I found the paper there, torn up and wet with blood, that made all the trouble. I found another quite the same, with only a blot of ink. I said to myself, 'One good turn will have another,' and sent it to the council. You were promoted; and all that you are at this moment, more than a mass of bones in the criminals' acre, or a frozen ghost in Siberia, you owe to me, — yes."

This was a lie. But the young soldier, with child-like credulity, replied, "Sir, you astound me!"

"Very like I do," responded the other, carelessly. "And now if you think me worthy anything more than a rouble and a door, I am ready for my reward."

"Sir, you are welcome. Ask what you will."

The little man leaned over the table and said a few words in a low tone. The soldier started back.

"Would you drive me to a new murder to cover up the last?"

"H'm. Your mind runs to murders," said the stranger. "Over the door below I saw, as I entered, that — er — true victors conquer with the — er — the — er — what is it?"

"'True victors conquer with the brain, not sword!'"

"Exactly so, sir; exactly so. And now you begin to comprehend me, sir — begin to comprehend."

He leaned over the table again and talked rapidly for a moment, then rising, said slowly:

"I think we understand each other now. I ask the favor in return for favors given. But, by the gods! if

you betray me, I'll come like a torch at midnight, and write your secret with fire in the heavens, where all the world can see." Then he closed the door behind him, leaving the soldier with nothing to do but to obey; while he restlessly walked and walked the streets of the capital, surely not so well satisfied as might have been supposed.

He paused for a moment before the statue of Peter the Great, at the eastern end of Admiralty Square, poised on the great ragged memorial pedestal.

He raised his hand, and was about to swear by the gray-blue mass, — gray-blue in the dawning, — when one of those heavy-armed Russian home soldiers, that stood like bristling thorns over St. Petersburg, gave that warning word, "Move on!" and withdrawing his arm, he moved on, hanging his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, while his eyes half closed themselves. As he moved, he muttered, "Yes, yes; it is the blind horse that minds the bit, because he must."

Following upon this, there was little of interest for several years. Alexander gave freedom within, and made wars without, and so kept peace. In 1806 and 1807 he marched his armies unsuccessfully against the French, and in 1814 successfully into Paris, following the famous retreat from Moscow, and again at Waterloo.

In such seasons of public excitement, private existence is submerged; but there came a lull for some years before the quiet death of Alexander in 1825, and in that lull, private life burst into a luxuriant bloom again.

CHAPTER IV.

A LADY FAIR TO SEE. TAKE CARE!

EIGHTEEN hundred and twenty-one! For twenty years the mansion of the Kramareffs has lain in mourning. The little girl is upon the very verge of being a woman, and is very beautiful. Few know it, however, for a gloom hangs over the mansion, and its mistresses never go out of it except to drive. Suddenly the house appears in an uproar. The sound of the hammer, the voices of workmen, the odors of fresh oil and varnish, all testify that something new is taking place in the somber, silent halls.

How it all happened, Elise, the life-nurse of the countess's daughter, knew, and reported in the servants' hall. She was the one who held the child to receive the blessing of the dying count, twenty years before. Who had a better right to know the secrets of the countess's daughter than the old nurse Elise? She was in her lady's dressing-room. Perhaps her lady did not know it. The countess and her daughter were in the next room, talking eagerly together, and the door was open between them just a crack. It might have been closed, had not the wind blown it, or Elise pushed it. And there she stood and listened. Was it wrong?

"Fie! on such plebeian nonsense!" said the stately, white-haired personage bearing the proud name of Von Kramareff. And Elise wondered what the plebeian nonsense was, and so did the rest of the servants when she told them. "You will not marry the man I select; you will not choose from those who ask for you, good, bad, and indifferent, I grant you; and what then will you do? for you must marry;" and the white head bobbed up and down inside, and Elise's head bobbed up and down outside, as she watched her and echoed, "There's truth there, lady." But the countess went on: "You are our only child, and when the noble count, your father, lay on his death-couch, you were brought to his pillow." Here the countess wiped the chronic tear from her eye — the left eye and right-hand corner, that by law and mechanism had never failed in twenty years to moisten that expression. And here, with an extra bob of her head, Elise observed, "There's truth in that, lady, for I did it." And the countess continued: "He gave you his blessing as though you were a son. 'In your veins alone, my little one,' said he, 'will flow the proud blood of the Kramareffs. Honor it as it should be honored.'" And the countess's white head and the nurse's began their bobbing again.

"Yes, mamma," exclaimed the young woman, sobbing in a way that was not at all chronic, "and I will not dishonor it by marrying one of the louts that come bargaining with you for my money, and with not a thought of me. 'Love your wife like your heart, beat her like your shuba,' is too common nowadays. I do not like it. I will honor the man I marry, or —"

"Child, beware of oaths!" exclaimed the countess, putting a stop to that at once. And even the nurse's head outside the door had stopped its bobbing and begun wagging in a warning, woe-begone way. "There are many men in Russia," the countess continued, "who would not die for wealth."

"Hosts of them, mamma; but they are the ones that are not ready to die for me, either."

"I can call proud names," said the mother, "I have refused to please your fastidiousness. Tell me, how long do you think the offers will last?" Elise began to twist about, keeping with difficulty one eye and one ear to the crack. She wanted to sneeze, if the truth were told. But the duelists within seemed to have locked swords, for the countess's daughter only replied, with a little hysterical laugh, "Longer than necessary. And proud of what? their good looks, or their bad hearts, I warrant you. No; I will love the man I marry, and be loved by him."

"But you are in no position, child, to carry out such a doctrine, pleasant as the words may sound; for love is rare in our society, except that born of marriage. But the house of Kramareff must have an heir by you."

"And shall his father be our cousin, Major Wolzonn, mamma? No other man has asked for me who could inspire my soul with a first breath of love."

"Ah, child, the bitterest of enemies are two ill-mated friends."

"Well, who then shall I marry, mamma?"

"Tell me, rather, who *will* you marry?"

That was as long as Elise could wait. She almost flew from the crack of the door, and only half across the room sneezed once, twice, three times, into her

dress and petticoats folded four or five double. It was the critical moment. Elise would have given half her wardrobe just then for a wooden nose. Elise's nose was always giving her trouble in that way. Excitement acted upon it like pungent snuff. Poor Elise! it was the very best feature in a tolerably homely face. She hurried back to the crack the moment her nose had come into position again; but the crisis was over; she only heard the countess say:

"You are aiming high, my daughter. Beware that you do not miss the mark, and fall lower than you think for it."

The first official announcement of anything out of the common course came in the news that the mansion was to go through repairs from turret to foundation. This was followed by one more startling: that the repaired mansion was to be the scene of a grand old-time banquet.

The countess said "A ball!" with as much solemnity as she would have said "A funeral." The countess's daughter, in an uncertain sort of amazement, repeated the command "A ball!" The long-faced house-servants, who, through years of solemn training, had learned to tread the halls on tiptoe, speak in a whisper, and never smile outside their own domain, stupidly stared and said, "A *ball!*" The gloomy walls, that for years had echoed to every sound nothing but "dead!" now hoarsely grated to "A ball!" The crape that hung about a large oil-painting of the count in the main hall seemed to shiver, as though one everlasting chill were creeping round and round the frame, and in its shivering to say, "A ball?"

Throughout the capital there was more or less

wonder and speculation as to what had caused, and what would result from this coming-out of the Kramareffs. Many halfway friends took it upon themselves to become interested.

As for this daughter, whom the count had left to honor his name and house, and who found so much vexation in the course of it, much might be said or little. She possessed her mother's queenly bearing in beautiful simplicity. Unlike most Russian ladies, she was an exquisite blonde. Her hair, in waving masses, was like the purest sunlight; her cheeks were transparent, just tinged with the rose-flush of life's early summer-time; her eyes alone were dark, and such eyes as could burn and wither what they chose — they were her father's eyes. But for the almost impenetrable seclusion to which she had easily accustomed herself, knowing no other life, she must long ago have been able to choose, from a multitude, one whom she might love and by whom be loved, and the part which she played afterward have been taken by some other, or not have been played at all, which might have been far better — might have been worse.

Such, at least, so far as concerns this story, was the Countess von Kramareff's daughter. What her hopes and expectations, founded in the coming ball, might be, no soul beside her mother knew. Possibly nurse Elise had noticed a sudden change in her charge, when a note was presented from the private secretary of the Prince von Meerschaum, regretting that an early trip to Poland rendered the attendance of his Highness impossible.

The banquet went on for all that, however, and

was pronounced by all a grand success. Even Arachne, before Minerva made a spider of her, could not have woven a robe that would have made the daughter more beautiful; nor could a mask from Vulcan's forge have concealed more thoroughly than did a dazzling smile, any random regrets that were cutting and piercing the heart.

At first, simply to carry out some vague revenge which she had planned, yet hardly anything profound enough to be called revenge, she petted the smiles and encouraged the lavish attention of an exquisite stranger. He had been introduced by a high government official. "It is all for a jest," she said to herself. But this was the first she had seen of the world; and it was far easier than she thought to go from jest to earnest, as one might say, in such a thing as that. "And really," she said again, "he must be one of the most brilliant, gentle, bold, and loving men to be found in the wide world. He could not be more so, and yet —" She checked herself there, for after all, when she thought of "HIM," there was a twinge of anger, born of love, that caused her to wonder if after all "he" might not be something even more.

So much for the random considerations of a young woman, *over*-young, though two-and-twenty, in comparing the first man she had ever spoken with, except as her mother sat by her side in a parlor or coach, with another man, whose voice she had never heard, and whom she had never seen but as he rode of an afternoon on the popular Prospect.

Albrecht von Bremen was this exquisite little stranger's name; a sort of mortal Vulcan he. My lady's

first conclusion was not very far from right. He was from Denmark. His tongue was his sledge, his lips his forge. Twenty-six letters the metal that he used, and in the use of it he wrought some very remarkable things. His figure, though small, was powerful and graceful. He had thick, curling hair, dark, drooping, somewhat uncertain and treacherous eyes, a waving moustache, white hands, and round, dimpled fingers that might have belonged to a cherub, and might, after all, have paddled in many a muddy stream. She crossed swords with him, leaving herself unguarded, and at the very outset the world of freedom and romance proved too much for her. She had even told him that they should spend much of the summer at Geneva, and had smiled when he replied that he should be there too. Yet the Dane was forever becoming a Russian, and doubling or trebling in size; and from one to the other her thoughts would vacillate till she seemed to love both and neither; then one, and then the other; and ended by wondering what love was, and if anybody loved, and how they loved and for how long. There were many lessons she had yet to learn. Life is a thorough schoolmaster, and teaches much before he has done with his task; the truth, for instance, of the old Spanish proverb, afterward adopted by Shakspeare, that "all that glitters is not gold;" that man must be taken one half the time, at least, to mean what he does not say, and that too often —

> "Love 'mid names of noble worth
> Is but a noble myth,
> That lives and dies on futile hopes
> And fertile disappointments."

CHAPTER V.

PRINCE VICTOR VON MEERSCHAUM.

THE trip to Poland upon which the Prince von Meerschaum had excused himself, was not altogether a myth, nor altogether true. He was one of those men who for personal worth, landed estates, and sounding title was courted, and flattered, and petted, till even the sight of a mortal betokened an insipid admirer, and consequently became a burden.

Long ago, in the early days of Peter the Great, when incognito he was playing the blacksmith, the ship-builder, the house-carpenter, &c., in Austria and Germany, he became intensely pleased with a nobleman's son, of high rank but very poor of purse, and offered to make him rich if he would come to Russia. This youth was Victor Reppoun. He followed Peter the Great, and married a princess of the blood. Peter allowed him to retain his Christian name if he should choose another for the princedom, and after adding to the wealth of the princess as a marriage gift a fabulous sum, he made the princedom perpetual to the heirs of Victor Reppoun, under the title of the "Prince von Meerschaum." Various good services rendered by descendants to later Tzars upon the throne, had been rewarded by princely donations in the shape of estates and gold, till the wealth of the

present owner, who also possessed the Christian name of the first prince, Victor Reppoun, was unequaled in all Russia, excepting only by the crown and crown royalty.

By some peculiar fortune or forethought, there had also been but one heir in each generation, as the years came down, so that the estates had been undivided, and the present Victor Reppoun, a man as perfect morally, intellectually, and physically as could well be, was almost monarch of all he surveyed. He acknowledged but few friends, but these were intimate, warmly loved, always welcome.

Four of these friends — Major Wolzonn was one of them — riding down the Gorokhovia, the gayest street of Russia's gay capital, toward the Champs-de-Mars, one morning about a week before the Countess von Kramareff's banquet, chancing to speak of the Prince von Meerschaum, voted on acclamation to take coffee with him at his Castle Foam. Constantine Wolzonn, alone of the four, was undemonstrative. He was always undemonstrative, for that matter. He was a strong and handsome officer, at least in his uniform and saddle, wearing the heavy braids of the majority on the inevitable square, high shoulders of the Russian. Thick but close-cut whiskers and a heavy moustache altogether covered every expression on his face, except as his eyes, dark, deep-set, and quietly active, disclosed his thoughts, as they shielded themselves behind becoming glasses.

Reaching the long, well-paved ascent, hardly a hill, called Nevskoi Prospect, they put spurs to their horses, and dashed off like the morning wind, past Alexander's Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, and

the Convent of St. Alexander Nevskoi, into the free country. They did not draw the rein, but the horses themselves, covered with foam, slackened speed beside a portal where they had often entered, just upon the oval of the hill.

Within, the broad parks were just starting into green — emerald green.

> "Here many miles of fertile ground
> With walks and trees were girded round;
> And here were gardens, bright with summer rills,
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery."

That description by Coleridge is too perfect to venture another in its place.

Now the riders were lost in the deep shadow of a pine grove. Now they rode on the shores of a lake wild as the Lago di Garda, and emerging again from a shadow, they were suddenly brought face to face with the massive battlements of a great white castle, Castle Foam! resting in all its glory amid the sunny greenery. Whether it won its name from the view, from its towers, of the far-off sea, or from the white sandstone of which those towers were built, "Meerschaum" (sea-foam) was the only name they could have called it. From the German blood in their veins the sound pleased them well, and they called it "Meerschaum." Say the word where you would, from any angle of the castle, and a silvern echo would whisper "sea-foam" in your ears.

Brightly dressed stable-boys took their horses, and the riders entered the castle together.

Castle Foam was built in the form of the Greek

cross, with two broad halls from end to end, and over each of the four great doors were illuminated windows recalling some scene in Russia's history. The walls throughout the halls were well covered with paintings. The master of the house himself possessed a rare ability in the art. A few of his own productions, and the skillful arrangement of many others, bore ample testimony to this. The floors were of rich mosaic in all the designs of Italy, Egypt, Greece, and India, supporting everywhere the most rare and exquisite *bijouterie*, marbles, and all the choice minerals, wrought by hands that had touched the hem of King Solomon's purple, that had pushed the wheels of Asoka's chariot, held flowing bowls at Nebuchadnezzar's banquets, or tossed an ugly coin to blind Homer, led by his daughter about the gates of Thebes. The smoking-room, into which the four were ushered, — where, with wine and cigarettes, to await the prince, — was luxurious in the extreme. There were soft-cushioned divans perfumed with Oriental odors, a marble floor and frescoed walls. A black marble Garamha from beside the fountain in the great Eden about the Taj Mahal, and a white marble Bacchus, guarded appropriately cigarettes and decanters in elaborate cases at their feet.

The prince was engaged at the moment with another caller in his private library. See! A very picture of manhood he! tall, athletic, of graceful figure, with thick curling hair, only a moustache, high forehead, and firm but laughing eyes. He is nine-and-twenty or thereabout, but with that peculiar maturity and integrity in his large eyes and determined mouth that one may sometimes find, but rarely this side of the

ideal, and when found, one finds invariably an honorable and a handsome man. Such was Victor Reppoun, the Prince von Meerschaum. His friends, combining the two titles, knew him better as simply the Prince Reppoun.

His guest is small. He too is handsome, and with curling hair, a waving moustache, and peculiar eyes. But what a difference! Pluto and Apollo! Scarcely less. After a peculiar and unreasonably elongated introduction, in which the prince had vainly endeavored to solve what manner of man he was, he cut the knot by remarking abruptly, "You said you had business with me. What is it?"

The stranger planted one foot forward, as if to brace himself for a grand effort, and said, very slowly, "I knew the prince, your father, my lord." And he hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves.

It was evident that the stranger had proposed a tragedy, but seeing no cause for any, the prince replied, not without some signs of bewilderment, "One is always welcome coming in my honored father's name. Be seated, friend, and smoke."

"Ah! thanks!" replied the little man, seating himself, and leisurely lighting a cigar; and then he rambled off again very much as he had in his introduction, into a long, meaningless conversation, scarcely possible to be for any other cause than to hear himself speak, yet carrying withal an intimation of a point somewhere, and only half covered. The prince listened as he would have listened to the barking of some stupidly innocent dog that he could

not bring himself to kick into silence, till, throwing away the last of his third cigar, the stranger lit a fresh one, rose, bowed, and had reached the door. Then he turned suddenly to say, "Beg pardon, my lord, beg pardon, I had—er—yes, I had almost forgotten a little matter which I came to speak to you about."

Patience was hardly a virtue any longer, and rising, the prince replied, "Pray, sir, proceed. What is it?"

"Oh—er—nothing of great importance; no; simply that I—er—I knew the prince, your father, my lord."

"So I understood you, sir."

"Did you? Yes, yes, perhaps you did. But I was going on to say that I knew him to his sorrow. In fact, a little better than the old man—"

"Sir!"

"Beg pardon, my lord, beg pardon. Did not mean to ruffle you. Only meant to say that the *noble* prince, like many other noblemen, once in his life did what he had better have left undone, and that I knew of it. I was not over-wealthy, that is to say, not uncomfortably so; so every—er—yes, every now and then he caused yellow souvenirs of the event to be sent to me. Golden quieters, you know!"

"Well?"

"Well, and well what, my lord?"

"Well what!"

"Oh—er—yes, I see, do not comprehend me yet, do not comprehend. Then let me be explicit. His Highness thought to cheat me of my income by—er—well, by dying. But not so think I, for a dutiful son

will keep a father's honor just as sacred as his own;" and within himself he added, "When it is eminently for his own advantage to do so."

"That honor is too sacred for the traffic of such as you," said the prince in a tone lavish with disgust, yet restrained by the subject of which he spoke. "But did you also think that I should give you money for threats like these?"

"*Rem acu tetigisti!*" exclaimed the little man, slapping the table. "Exactly so, my lord. Exactly so! Money! yes, money! That powerful lever that will move the world will move me too, to silence. A silence, let me add, that for you as well as me would be verily golden."

"Man, you are a fool! and if you leave the castle before I am too angry to be patient, your exit will be the easier for it. I have no idea of granting what you ask."

"Beg pardon, my lord; I do not—er—*ask*, I demand it!"

The unparalleled impudence of some men, "cheek" we call it in this modern day, is a matter of absolutely incomprehensible wonder. Ignorance makes the goose hiss at the lion. But surely such men as this one before us are not ignorant. On the other hand, the forbearance of some men, more especially those, of all, best able to wreak a wholesome vengeance, is equally astonishing. The prince simply answered, scornfully, "I wish I had known your errand when you came. You had better go now."

"Come, come, my lord," replied the little man, much as if he were urging some moral duty upon a child, "do not grow sarcastic with me just at such a

time, for I must *live*. Mother earth is bound to furnish a support for all her offspring, and to each according to the palate she has given him. Now why should not I live upon what *I* know, as justly as you live on the results of what your fathers knew, especially as in my case it is supposable that the fathers knew *nothing*, having left *no* result but *me*. Ignoble remnant, am I not? But to continue. Illegitimate sons are not thought so much of in Russia at large as by their fathers. What is that to me? You have relatives in Germany who would reward one well that made vacant for them such an envied princedom; and I can do it. Do you begin to comprehend, my lord?"

"Fool! You intimate that I am not the lawful heir of the house of Meerschaum. It need only be proven, and I will leave the place vacant in an hour."

"H'm. That is one way. Another is to give me thirty English sovereigns a month. Cassimir, master of the black bark "Midnight," will call for the gold, and thereby my lips are sealed. But mind you, and mind you well: I'll sell my knowledge to you or to one who hates you. I'll serve the best paymaster, and, by my faith, I'll serve him well! Muzzle not the ox that treadeth out your corn, my lord prince."

The prince started to his feet, and without waiting for formality or even a bow, the little man was gone.

Left alone, the prince sat silently pondering for a moment, then rose and laughed at himself. "What a fool I," he exclaimed, "to think for an instant of the haranguing of this distorted Heoredipetoe! Illegitimate? Impossible! My mother had but one child, myself, beside Marie, who was only adopted at the

best, and has lain for fifteen years and more in the vault of our little church at Schaumburg. If I were not the lawful heir, I'd rather beg my bread than keep a mortal for one day from what is his by right. But if I be the Prince von Meerschaum, and till something more is told than that, I shall surely think I am. Ah! sneaking blackmailer, 'twill take more than your silvern speech to purchase a ruble's worth of silence!"

Thereupon, dismissing the subject entirely from his mind, as not worthy a moment's consideration, he sought the smoking-room, where his approach was heralded by two pages in bright uniforms, who threw the great doors open, and knelt, as though his Royal Highness the Tzar were passing in.

"Welcome, friends of mine!" exclaimed the prince, extending both hands to his guests; "welcome to Castle Foam on this beautiful morning!"

"You honor us. We salute your Highness," said Major Wolzonn, with a rather solemn bow.

"The honor is to me, not you, friend major."

And the major replied:

> "'Honor be given where honor is due;
> You honor us that we honor you.'"

"Up to your old tricks with other men's words at once," laughed the prince. "But why not, indeed? It is *actions*, not words, eh? that tell the tale with soldiers. And now, friends, breakfast is waiting. Come out with me to the coffee-room."

Four marble figures supported a table burdened with delicacies; and as the five gathered about it, naturally enough a lack, the only one, was made all the more evident by the remaining perfections. One

of the guests spoke his mind. "How a lady's form would grace my lord's palace, making heaven of paradise!"

It gave the cue, and another added, "Even Eden pleased neither Maker nor tenant without an Eve."

"They are a dangerous sisterhood," laughed the prince. "Remember, I pray you, why Adam is not in Eden still."

"And will my lord resist a temptation to Paris this summer, where the Princess Shehovskoi spends a month?"

"A great temptation surely! Into that hotbed of France, to watch a woman whom we see every day, the winter through, on our own beautiful Prospect."

"Can you devise an excuse as good against Switzerland and the daughter of the Countess von Kramareff? And, by the by, the banquet! — just a week to-night!"

Major Wolzonn's eyes flashed with this last name, in spite of the curving lip and scornful laugh, as the prince responded, "Ah, friends, why chase them? They will all come back of themselves. Vacation should be recreation."

"And not an opportunity to break one's heart anew," added the major.

"And is your heart also weary with its breakings, that you understand my case so thoroughly?"

The prince laughed heartily over his cup of tea, and possibly the major's cheek flushed a little under his moustache and beard, as he answered dryly, "Somewhat weary."

Prince Reppoun had hardly given the countess's banquet a thought. Now it suddenly occurred to

him that his invitation had been such that he must either go or excuse himself. The latter he always did when opportunity offered, and instantly resolved to make an opportunity just here. The result of it was his next remark, as he leaned back from the table.

"Friend major, I've a resort in my mind far better for such as we than women, France, or Switzerland."

"Look before you leap, my lord," said the officer dryly.

"Look you, then! When I was a boy, my father turned me loose one summer — sent me out to pasture on an estate of his in Poland."

"Suggestive intimation that we go out to pasture too."

"Nothing less, friend major. I have not been there since; but as I remember it, the surroundings were richer as hunting-grounds than I have ever found in Russia. I am going to test the truth this summer, starting the day after to-morrow, and I invite you all to go with me. Will you go?"

The major's hands had fallen suddenly upon the table with this information, and in his eyes was a blank, vacant stare; a shudder ran over him, and while all the rest acclaimed their pleasure in accepting, he sat like one deaf, dumb, and blind. Yet, if the truth were told, he was more anxious than any other in that company to go into Poland with the Prince von Meerschaum.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EMERALD OCEAN.

THE major had said, "Confound it!" and said it strong, when out of sight and sound. He cursed his luck that he was a soldier instead of a nobleman, and was therefore simply allowed to move in society where he could not marry. He cursed the Prince Reppoun and a hundred others, and swore a love as eternal as the everlasting hills. That was the trouble. The soldier was in love; and love in a soldier is not unlike love in a nobleman, or any man, I fancy. His stripes and epaulets and breastplate of honors are but a pretense, after all. But the great trouble with Major Wolzonn was that he had fallen in love a little above his rank in society; a freak one never indulges in, whether successfully or otherwise, without sadly regretting it in time, in a land where the demarkations of society are so plain as they were in Russia. The object of this affection was his cousin, the Countess von Kramareff's daughter. He could not content himself to go away to Poland without making at least one last attempt to win her favor. Last! For two years past each separate attempt had been his last, until he found an opportunity to make another. Being a relative, he had much more liberty at the Kramareff mansion

than others enjoyed, and found it easy to secure a moment alone with the lady he loved, or fancied he loved, more than heaven and earth beside. He was older than she by sixteen years, — a sort of second father, the mother-countess thought. He chose the time for this "last appeal" when taking his leave for his hunting-trip. The result was so near what he expected that he might have acted it all out in his own room, and saved this "last" till some other time. She put out her little white hand as confidently as to a father, and said, "My true friend, Major Wolzonn, you have always been, and I pray you, oh, so earnestly! ever be my friend. But more than that why *will* you ask me, when you know it cannot be in justice to our family." It was short and sweet, — a pretty speech and comprehensive; something like a general's speech on a battle-eve, only that here it came after the battle. There was one thing, too, that was not as he expected. She did not sob, or turn her head away. She had always sobbed more or less before, and sometimes turned her head quite away from him. Just now there was a more important being sitting at the fountain-head, claiming all the tears, and the major half suspected something of the sort. He took the refusal like a soldier, however, grasped the little hand in both of his, and on his knees said, "Then I will try and let this be the last. Hold me a friend, my lady, and by my sword and this fair hand, Theseus shall not be more worthy such a place!"

The soldier had conquered the lover, temporarily at least and as the world saw it; and even his idol lady, who boasted no truer friend, never knew how

deep were the folds of crape that in a word and a moment she had wound about a human heart; for though they lasted long, they were fast bound under a uniform.

It was with an over-heavy heart that he rode with the gay company toward their hunting-ground. They had mounted early the last morning, and were very near their destination, as announced by the guide who rode in advance. They followed, single file, down a narrow lane. The rear was brought up by their valets, baggage mules, and the hunter with the hounds.

Only an hour before, the golden rays of the rising sun had shot across the valley. Like fire-darts they had struck the distant hill-tops, and in an instant the magic touch had wrought a crown of glory there, while the fog-banks sank lower into the valley, and the darkness, driven from the summit, seemed to lie with double blackness down below. Night is forever so reluctant to give place to day!

The guide reached the summit in advance, and sat upon the bold peak, with one hand stretched triumphantly toward the valley beyond.

"Eureka!" cried the Prince Reppoun, the first huntsman upon the scene, to the others who urged their horses after him. "Come and look at these wide leagues of emerald floating in the wind, and tell me if such forests are not worth the coming here to *see* even!"

"'The will of the wind is than Fancy less fickle.' Wait a week, my lord, and you will hate that solemn, green ocean from sheer satiety."

"And a few more of those poetical wisdoms of yours

to dampen our ardor," said the prince to Major Wolzonn, "I vow, will condemn you in an open court-martial."

But their hunting and fishing, while camping by the lake, were not altogether satiety. For example, the Prince Reppoun, becoming heated in the chase and separated from the others, stopped his horse for a moment on the banks of a deep gurgling brook. While the animal drank, the master languidly repeated Shelley's thought of the Serchio.

> "Fervid from its mountain source,
> Silent, smooth, and strong doth course."

"Silently" the reins fell from his hand and into the water. He sprang to catch them. The horse started. The soft bank gave way under his feet. With a sudden lunge he saved himself; but at sight of his rider emerging from the brook's depth dripping with water and mud, he gave a loud whinny of freedom, tossing the mossy earth into the air behind him by way of a farewell, and wheeling about, as disdainfully as Pegasus from the plow, he sprang upward and away.

The prince laughed, even before he had gained a footing on the bank. There was certainly something absurd in it all; but the fortunate thing was that the sufferer should see it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PEARL THAT LAY BURIED THERE.

"I DRIP very like the bronze from the mausoleum of Hadrian that stands in the fountain of the basilica of St. Peter's. With no apparent cause, no source from which the water comes, like him, I still continue dripping," observed the prince, as he worked with sticks and leaves to rid his clothes of mud. His arms ached. It was almost a despairing juncture, when a rustling in the leaves betrayed a young girl rising from a mossy log, not fifteen feet away from him, hidden by the shrubbery. She was surely laughing at his severe maneuvering. It was rather awkward, yet he raised his hat, stammering, "These are most ungraceful circumstances in which to meet a lady."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "you must not mind me, for I'm hardly nineteen, and only a village girl at that." Smiles chased each other over a pretty, merry face, not at all unrefined, though brown, as she continued, "Only I thought I could do that better than you, perhaps, though I am not so large." Two coal-black eyes wandered slowly upward from his feet, till half askance they rested full upon his own, and sent a quiver of some strange sort down into his heart. She looked up, much as one from a valley

surveys a snow-capped mountain, and the freshest of rosy lips involuntarily murmured, "What a tremendous thing you are, I do declare!" Then forthwith she began brushing off the mud, despite his protestations.

For the life of him, the prince could think of nothing to say. Silence was more than oppressive; and at last, in despair, he fairly sprang away from her, exclaiming, "That will do, that will do; indeed it will, lady!" She examined him carefully from head to foot, and demurely pronounced her judgment.

"It is surely better than it was, sire."

"You must have wandered very far," said he, looking at her admiringly.

"Not so very far," she said. "I've lived for years in the old mill yonder; and a little down below is the village of Arantha. Were you never there, sire?"

"I never was, lady." His answer was brief, for he was busy upon a tour of inspection. She was short, and classically delicate, this little waif who had "lived for years in the old mill yonder." Every motion was innately graceful, in spite of the simplest of peasants' costume. Rich masses of raven-black hair, only half covered by the Polish sun-hat hanging idly upon her shoulders, fell thick to her waist. In her dark and literally flashing eyes, her thin, straight, Danish nose, her firm but rosy lips, and delicately tapering wrists, hands, and fingers, was a depth of refinement difficult to understand; as strange an anomaly in such a place as would be the sacred lotos of the Nile on the dry breast of the Sahara. Notwithstanding that the prince was champion of Peters-

burg as *un cœur glacé*, the novelty pleased him. Why not?

"Have you always lived here, *ma petite?*" he asked, and to his astonishment, catching the last words of his question, she left the Polish dialect in which they had been speaking, and in perfect French replied: "Oh, no, indeed, sire, not always, though for longer than I can remember."

A book lay on the log where she had been sitting. He picked it up, and in amazement turned over leaf after leaf of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, in old Italian.

"And can you read this too, lady?" he exclaimed.

"I was reading it, sire, till you disturbed me. But I'm no lady."

"These are deep thoughts for a young mind," said the prince.

"Oh, yes, indeed, sire; and very much too deep for me; but — Well, do you know I have actually learned by heart all my books that are easy to understand, French and Russian; and there are only a few of these hard ones left, so I must read them, don't you see? And, of course, it would not grow easier to understand simply because I grew old; so why not read it now as well as by and by?"

"But the book is very valuable as well as hard to read."

"Yes, I suppose so; but I had very little to do with that. The giver of the book and the teacher to read it were the same. Good Father Arantha, our priest down yonder." She crossed herself, and whispered, "Holy Mary guard his ashes where they lie under

the altar! They changed the name of the village to his when he died, sire."

"But why is a vile cross like this on a cover owned by a Greek priest, *ma petite?*"

"The cross is not vile!" she answered sharply. "He was far holier to me than a Greek priest, sire; he was a Roman Catholic."

She had been picking leaves from a linden spray and dropping them while she spoke. This time she threw one upon the ground so fiercely, and looked up with such a bold, defiant fire in her black eyes and toss of her raven-black hair, that despite himself the prince could not refrain from smiling, and the very endeavor to refrain made matters so many times the worse. She had a fair share of pride too, for her brown cheeks were purple in an instant, and rising from the log where she had seated herself again, she turned quickly to leave him, exclaiming, "It pleases me that I have been able to amuse you, sire."

The prince sprang forward, and, fascinated more by this little brown child of the wilderness than ever by gay exotic of his fair home, fell upon his knee, and catching one little brown hand in his, pleaded earnestly, "Forgive, forgive me, lady. I wish you well, and your religion, far more truly than you think."

"Weal or woe for wishing is quite the same to me, sire," she replied, with an independent toss of the little head, as who should say, "The forests are mine, and the trees are bigger than you, sire."

"But you can forgive me, lady. You surely can be generous enough to grant me that."

"Perhaps," she said, glancing down upon him with a little laugh in the corners of the merry black eyes.

"But, indeed, sire, I am no lady, and — Please, sire, you hurt my hand."

Victor Reppoun dropped the tiny palm, and almost a blush swept across his cheek. He rose from his knees, at the same time picking up one of the linden leaves. He offered to walk with her to the mill, as the shadows were growing very long.

"That's rather odd," she remarked, demurely; "very well for politeness, I suppose. But really, it is I must show you the way, and when we get to the old mill I'll lend you my pony. Have you very far to go?"

Ah me! This iceberg from the northern seas had floated very calmly into the gulf stream, and was wasting. It had not once occurred to him that he had no more to do than wind his bugle, when a page would bring his horse.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated, "I had forgotten myself. Indeed, I do not know how far I have to go, lady. Where is Round Lake, do you know?"

"The Round Lake? Dear me! It is such a ways from here that I think you could never walk it in the world. You are a nobleman, are you not, sire?"

"And can a nobleman do nothing, *ma petite?*"

"Some things, I suppose, but not everything, can he? And if all the little story-books you think I ought to read are true, he is surely not much of a pedestrian, but is always riding in grand coaches. My pony will go the distance for you, though, while you are winking fifty times. Just let him follow the brook on the other side yonder, and if he does not stop before, he'll wind up by dropping you over his head right into the lake. Do you see, sire?"

"I see, little one, and will hold quits with the brook for the wetting it gave me."

They came out upon the lake, and in ecstasy he exclaimed:

"Ah! lovely spot! How I should admire to put you in my sketch-book!"

She looked up with that peculiar searching glance which black eyes are apt to possess, a bewitching sort of interrogation, and observed:

"That's odd! A nobleman and an artist too, my lord? But it is a pretty place. An Italian artist has been at Arantha for a week, sketching about the mill."

While she talked she unbound a light canoe. The prince looked doubtfully at the frail bauble, and asked:

"Shall I not wade, or swim, for short? This ship is scarcely large enough to ferry a fairy."

"Please, sire," she replied, almost anxiously, "you've had enough of the water for one day, I should think; or do you like it? Now get in!" And while the prince seated himself as awkwardly as might well be, she added: "My little boat is not so big as that black horse of yours. What a tremendous thing he was! But my boat never tipped me into the water, you know, and really I don't believe it could. Big things are not always the best, are they?" she asked, evasively. "I mean, some things."

"You mean my legs," said the prince, no longer trying to suppress a laugh, though the canoe shook like a leaf in the wind. "No, they are not always, I admit. Just now they would be much better if a foot or two shorter."

"That would be rather odd. But be careful!" As

she stepped into the boat it gave a lurch that seemed to the prince to have nearly overturned it. "The water is cold for a bath — is it not, sire?"

"A little, yes. At all events you had better not take one."

"Oh, no, indeed, sire, I don't expect to."

"Sh—sh—shall I row?" asked Victor Reppoun.

"Can you?" she replied, doubtfully.

"Give me the oars, and see," said he, still holding fast with both hands to the sides of the canoe.

"*Oars!*" she cried. "I never had but one — one at a time, I mean. That other stick is my push-off pole. But you may try, if you wish to. Here it is."

Victor Reppoun had no sooner taken the slender oar in his trembling hand than the little craft gave such a lurch that she shipped a thimbleful of water. The prince grasped the sides again, entirely unconscious that the one little oar had slipped away from him, and was floating off.

"Dear me!" sighed the captain, her hand upon her heart, while vindictive smiles were carousing all over her pretty face. "I really thought you were going to do that same thing over again. Did you do it on purpose the first time? I thought it was an accident. Dear me!"

The prince very slowly unwound his legs that were coiled painfully under him. She watched him with the utmost attention, her hands quietly crossed in her lap, her little feet thrust comfortably forward, one resting on the other, and the toe meditatively swinging from side to side; and when he had finished, she added, with another sigh, "Please, sire, we are not going very fast."

"Oh! but — why — where are the — "

"Please, sire, there was but one — one at a time, I mean."

"Well, then, where is the oar?"

"I gave it to you. You could not have — "

"But I did; I dropped it overboard."

"Dear me! And is that the way a nobleman rows a boat, sire?"

She turned about, took her seat for a paddle, and, kneeling in the bottom of the boat, began to splash and talk.

"It's because I'm not big enough for two, sire, that's why; and I see you are too big for one; so when I get it again I think I'd better keep it — don't you? And even now I'll hardly get home in time to drive to barn my little cow, and feed my pony. He's not so big as yours, but he does very well for me. He — "

"Stop! stop! child; there is the oar. See! you have missed it!" and Victor Reppoun had not dared lift a hand to catch it, though it almost struck the boat.

"What did you say, sire?" and a face just rollicking with smiles turned over her shoulder — she had been kneeling with her back toward him — as with scarcely a perceptible motion she caught the tip of the oar in the tips of her fingers.

"I said you'd upset us if you don't look out, lady."

"Oh, so indeed I will in just a minute. I want to get things all ready first, for I'm going to show you what one little oar and one little girl can do. But can't you swim? Don't be afraid, I can, and I'll save you if you tumble in. Now then!" She seated her-

self at last, much to the satisfaction of her passenger. "Take care! and hold on tight!"

"Indeed, lady, I could not hold tighter to save my life."

And she showed him beyond a doubt. They shot like an arrow, as the little oar in her strong arms bent almost half double. Only a moment it seemed. He had not yet become accustomed to the motion, when a sudden turn of the oar made the speed slacken, and a sudden grating, and a sudden stopping short, threw the proud Prince von Meerschaum flat upon his back.

"And did you hurt yourself, or did you do it on purpose?" she asked compassionately, and before he could gather himself up to reply, she had pointed him to an arbor where he could wait for her, and hurried away to the old mill yonder.

He had not waited long when down the narrow path, not skipping like a still outgrown baby, nor yet with the dreamy step of a maiden of much and hard reading, came the fairy of the forest in simple peasant fashion, clasping the hand of—

"Papa, the miller, my lord."

The old man bowed very low to the prince, looking him over from head to foot. His mental observation was, "A Russian nobleman, and of high rank, I'll be bound. Now, by my soul, this must not be!—Kathi Chichkini," he said, addressing the girl, "run to the house and direct about the work I was overseeing."

The mental observation of the prince on the same sort of a survey was: "No low-born country soul, this miller of Arantha. He has seen the world, and has the weight of some wickedness on his mind."

"You are welcome, my lord," said the old man, more courteously, when Kathi Chichkini was well out of sight. "My daughter tells me you were unhorsed, and have five versts to go. You are welcome to her pony, it is a fine riding animal. You may return it in the morning. And pardon me, my lord," he added, as a boy brought a tray of steaming tea, with bread and honey, "when you have eaten of our bread and salt you had best be quickly off, for the road is a faint footpath, and it will be very dark before you reach the Round Lake."

The prince recalled the fact that the moon was full and high, and would also have discovered the true cause of the miller's anxiety, had he been watching him instead of drinking tea. And now the "pony" was brought, — a fiery saddle-horse, full of the fury of the winds, and almost more than the man could manage who led him forward. It required all the skill of the experienced rider to mount; but once mounted, the prince was much more at home than in the little boat upon the lake. The animal reared, lunged, kicked, neighed wildly under the unaccustomed burden, giving the rider an abundance of time, before he was finally prepared to listen to argument, to draw a magnificently jewelled dagger from his belt, which he tossed at the feet of the miller, saying, "An earnest, father, that I will return in the morning."

He looked about him for Kathi Chichkini, a new name that now rang in his ears as persistently as though all the elves of Poland were crying it after him. She was nowhere to be seen. Reluctantly he gave up a wish to say farewell, and turned toward the high gate in the strong wall that guarded the mill from

the wild beasts in the winter time. The only half-tamed horse was rearing and prancing along, much to the delight of the prince, who was an admirable horseman, when just upon the other side the gate he discovered Kathi Chichkini sitting on the grass as though nothing, not even a ripple, had crossed the smooth surface of her life's lake. She was feeding a calf from her apron, though it was the very last moments of the twilight, and fully time that any calf were stabled for the night.

"And what art thou doing here, little one?" he asked, dropping almost unconsciously into the familiar "thou" of the Russian. But the court language pleased this small country girl better than Russian. She spoke it with wonderful grace, and in it replied.

"Among other things," she said, demurely, "I was imagining myself mistress of an immense park, and that this stupid calf was one of my deer; but he did not play his part well."

"And what else?" asked the prince. The horse was more quiet now, as though the sight of his mistress were a charm.

"Waiting to see you off," she replied frankly, looking up with wide-opened eyes that seemed to the prince almost to wonder why he should have asked such a thing. Acting upon the inclination of the moment, he was about to stop for a little chat, when she added, "But I think you'd better be on the way, sire; it's almost dark."

"So it is," said the prince, involuntarily asking himself, "What is it makes each of them so fearful of the other?" for the girl had peeped round the corner of the fence and through the gate as she spoke.

"They are not so afraid of the dark, I'll venture. There's the ghost of some secret hidden in the old mill yonder;" and though he had not the curiosity even granted to the average Russian, which is very little by nature, he added, "I wonder what it is." Then, lifting his hat, he smiled in spite of his momentary vexation at being invited to be on his way, and turned the vicious animal away from Kathi Chichkini. Finding a master on his back, the horse at last started into a furious run. Looking back, the rider waved a farewell salute, and saw a handful of grass, pulled for the calf, waved to him in return. The calf's head bobbed about this way and that after the blades. He saw that, too, and indistinctly heard, "Please, sire, be careful that you don't fall off!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLOUD-SHADOW OVER THE OLD MILL YONDER.

KATHI CHICHKINI did not go directly through the gate again, though she had told the strictest truth that she came out there to see her pony and his rider off. They were gone, and the air was growing chilly with moonlight; and the calf, more sensible than the mistress, had wandered toward the stable. Still she sat on the grass by the gate in silence and a sort of wonder. A little later, the miller's voice rang loud and strong on the night-air, calling her name. She simply replied that she was coming, and going to the stable, made it fast, shut the great gate, and entered the house. The miller would have given a good bit of silver — a whole ruble! — to have known her thoughts; and had she known it, she would not have sold them for many times that. It never occurred to her; and inadvertently she passed over to him, without charge, all the information that he desired.

"Are noblemen generally so elegant and fine?" she asked.

"Noblemen are a set of bloody debauchees!" he said suddenly, and with a vehemence that made the girl tremble; "fine enough on the outside, pretty to look at, but *devils* — black devils — in the heart!"

And he ground his heel into the smooth, polished floor with a determination that seemed to say, "That settles it!"

The prince fancied he had just such a friend in the gray-haired, gray-eyed old miller. But the wind whistled about his ears, leaves cut his face, breath almost failed him, and soon he abandoned his thoughts of the miller to give his entire attention to that wild pony. It was fortunate he had of himself chosen the right path, for no power could have turned him from it after he once started. He ground the bit between his teeth, and literally flew.

"How under heaven can such a child ride a horse like this!" exclaimed the prince, only at intervals catching his breath. "Did the priest Arantha teach her? Pony! yes. Merciful heaven! if one step should fail him."

Perhaps it was the evident force of this argument, or perhaps the existence of unexpected surroundings, that suddenly brought the pony to a position as motionless as the Pompeian bronzes prancing now in the piazza on the Bay of Naples.

When the prince became satisfied that he still sat firmly in the saddle, he glanced about him. Five tents, pointed and white, rose in front. The pony's feet trampled the outer brands of a smouldering camp-fire. The Round Lake sparkled in dimples of white over a smooth black surface just below. The irregular hills were softly outlined against the stars of the summer night.

"Five versts already!" said the rider in amazement; "I should not have thought it one." Then the rapid clatter of other hoofs roused him, and Major

Wolzonn, the first of the four, rode into the open circle, exclaiming, "Welcome to camp again, my lord; though you passed us so unceremoniously a moment ago. We were starting on a second systematic search for you."

With this remark, having dismounted, he approached the borrowed horse and laid his hand carelessly on the animal's shoulder, then started back, went closer again, walked about it, stopped directly in front, patted its nose, remarked in a quiet way "Aha!" to which in a moment he added, under his moustache, "I did not suppose Arantha was within fifty versts of here;" and aloud, when a little calmer, "A noble land you must have found, my lord, to afford a horse like this; your own returned a hopeless sight, — the bridle broken, the tail and mane solid with burrs, like a wild ass of the mountain."

"Slander away, friend," said the prince, laughing, and throwing himself on the grass by the remnants of the camp-fire; "but mind you, burrs will brush out, bridles will mend, tired horses will rest in a night, and to-morrow I'll match my wild ass of the mountains against any horse in camp except this new one, aye, even Major Wolzonn's."

The conveniently uncertain moonlight hid the various moods and changes plainly expressed in the officer's face, or the prince would have lost his merry mood in wonder. As it was, he lay upon his back, his head on his folded hands, blowing wreaths of smoke into the still air, while fairest Erato formed them into wonderful castles, with strange, romantic love-towers at every angle; and now and then he pressed his hand upon a pocket that contained a

small journal, in which he had deposited the linden leaf. One by one the circle about the fire decreased, till the soldier and the prince were alone. Major Wolzonn was stroking the head of one of the hounds, and carelessly observed, "A fine horse that, my lord."

"Eh? — Yes—h," replied Victor Reppoun, blowing one of those long, noncommunicative puffs of smoke upward, "too fine a horse for me."

The soldier, who was much wider awake, continued more quickly, "Is there a village hereabout, my lord, that can furnish a horse too fine for the Prince von Meerschaum?"

This did not sound like Constantine Wolzonn, and Victor Reppoun was on the point of sitting up to see what was the matter, but his own thoughts were too novel and agreeable. Still smoking, he replied, "I borrowed the horse of a — of an old man."

"Of an old man! Strange thing for an old man hereabout to own. Is he a hermit?"

"Yes—h—oh, yes, a hermit, I fancy; that is, I mean, a miller."

The prince rose, as if struggling with drowsiness, and despairing of any more quiet by the fire, added, "But really — he waited to yawn — I promised to have the horse back again by noon to-morrow, which I shall not wake up to do unless I go to bed."

Reluctantly the major yielded to necessity, and rose as the prince left the fire for his tent, then sat down again to stroke the head that *in statu quo* had been waiting his return.

"What is the matter with him?" he asked himself.

"Does he suspect that there is some mystery there? Is it — No, no, it cannot be, so soon."

In spite of this conviction, which should have been sufficient for any man of common sense, the major sat and sat and sat. Then he got up and wandered into the woods, so far that he startled himself lest he had lost the way; then down on the shore of the lake, tossing pebbles into the water, in vain endeavor to drive away some sort of an ugly nightmare, till the moonlight and the shadows were gone from the water, and the hills became more clearly outlined against the sky that was graying with another dawning.

He found himself near the servants' tents and the tethering-ground of the horses, sitting on a mass of gnarled roots that were thrown out of the ground, watching, as the light grew more certain, the graceful, restive horse that already was pawing the ground and neighing his disapproval of these new surroundings. "He said it was a hermit who lent the horse. Or did I say it? I hate the Prince Reppoun!" This was as bold as it was uncalled for, and he frightened himself into an instant apology, adding, "I don't know why, unless because every one else admires him, and I am branded by a spirit's brotherhood with Ishmael. Those dark eyes of his see every thing. Have they seen any more than a hermit? Seen any more than a horse? Or will they?"

"Well, well, friend major!" cried the deep, manly voice of the one whom he hated. "How now? Fares it ill with your health or your conscience, that the last at night and the first in the morning you are wide awake?"

The major attempted to rise. His overtaxed nerves

trembled before this unintended thrust, and he fell back heavily against the tree. But he startled himself more than the prince, who scarcely seemed to notice it. Then again the major struggled to his feet, and lifting his hat, endeavored to say something about early roll-call and review every morning, and second nature, but made abominably poor work of it. The prince was preoccupied, however, and the major came to the conclusion that those brown eyes that saw every thing had already seen more than a hermit, and more than a horse, and that he had intended an extremely pointed thrust in that unpremeditated good-morning. His mouth was sullenly closed thereafter, till the prince had mounted to return the horse; then pleading a sudden call to return to the capital, which he credited to official letters that had reached them the day before, he took his immediate portion of the camping furniture, and hastily left for St. Petersburg. He traveled as though the wolves of all Poland were after him.

A much better reply to the good-morning of the prince would have been "the same to you," for Victor Reppoun had not slept long, nor over-well. He had had hosts of curious thoughts keeping him awake; rambling, random thoughts of black eyes, rosy lips, brown cheeks, masses of hair, and pretty fingers; thoughts punctuated by frowns and smiles, shrugs of the shoulders, arching of eyebrows, bites on his moustache, and slaps on his knee. He had taken the journal from his pocket, looked long and earnestly at the linden leaf; wondered how it were possible that Kathi Chichkini was not more than a peasant, or, perhaps, but a serf; declared it was simply impossible! that she was an angel out of heaven; looked again at

the linden leaf, much as Cleopatra watched the serpent, little thinking how like Cleopatra's pet this leafy idol might become if made an altar for too long and earnest sacrifice to something in it and beyond it.

Oh, we labor hard upon our idols! By the sweat of our brows we carve the marble. Beautiful rises our ideal, and every hammer-stroke imbeds an atom of our own existence into its grooves and ovals. We set it on high upon a noble pedestal. We drape it with a robe more precious than the golden-threaded fabric Shah Jahan threw over Banoo Begum. A web of immortal hours, ruthlessly torn from the narrow limits of our lives, we wrap about it. Talents lent upon usury we lay in a napkin under the feet of our goddess. Then falling on our knees to the ideal, we cry, "Lo! here I am! all that there is in me rests on this pedestal! Oh, my life, live! Oh, my love, come to me! Open those arms, that from this burning fever with which my brain was tortured while I wrought, I may rest, rest, rest in them!"

And sometimes it is answered. Our excited vision beholds the mirage of our dream reflected in a human form. The ideal moves before us. Madly we fly to embrace — what? The real that moves, ready to love and live and labor, life and life, with us? No! Our ideal, that we at infinite cost have builded. Hence many a sorrow, many a wasted life. The quails were bitter to the hosts of Israel. We find an imperfection here and there. In angry disappointment we then cry, "I have been deceived! This is not what I asked for, not what I labored for, not what I wanted." Because we were looking then at — what? Only our own ideal, and would not see the real to

undeceive ourselves. What then? We crush the lily we have picked, and from its depth glides a tarantula to fasten on our hand. We cast away the rod we have selected, and as it falls, like Moses', it becomes a serpent to coil in our bosoms ever afterward.

But Victor Reppoun was in no mood to moralize. He placed the date beneath the linden leaf, wrote "*In memoriam*," and with a smile replaced the journal in his pocket.

It was already becoming a precious little thing to the cold-hearted Prince von Meerschaum. He drew out a tiny medallion that hung by a light gold chain about his neck and lay upon his breast. It was a lady's face, a wonderfully sweet face in miniature, set in a circle of diamonds. "What a similarity!" he said, holding it close under the little flame that flickered in a silver vase of oil, representing the sacred lotos that is supposed to have been the torch of the gods in the old mythic days upon the Nile. He pressed the medallion to his lips, whispering a name too softly, a name too precious to be heard on earth, and replaced it. Then bowing to the earth before a small crucifix, with our Lord in agony painted upon gold, he performed, not without a warm and earnest faith, the full duty of a Greek Catholic, and fell upon his tent-bed with cleaner hands and a purer heart than many to be found in Russia a half century ago.

"Those were the prettiest, sweetest lips I ever saw," he whispered drowsily. "I wish —" But what he wished only his dreams determined, and he was still dreaming when at the earliest daylight the neighing of the borrowed horse recalled him from the

pleasures of dream-land to the pleasures of real-land, and he went out to find the major in the very act of cursing him.

It was a full hour before the time appointed when he drew rein at the mill, saluted the miller, and returned the borrowed pony. With no reason to refuse, he accepted an invitation to drink tea, and entered the low, rudely furnished front room of the miller's *isba* for the favorite cup. The samovar, smoking and steaming, was put on the table by a gaunt but not unkindly woman, who also served it. The prince had hoped that Kathi Chichkini might do that.

The isba was rude enough, though a strong and comfortable affair; but even in the arrangement of the stools and tables about the room, and the hanging of little curtains behind the heavy shutters, most effectually spoke of a love existing there for better things than could be found in an old mill in Poland. But where was the lover? Surely the gaunt woman serving boiling tea had no such refinement; and the prince looked again for Kathi Chichkini. She did not come; and when the clock, hanging directly opposite him, where he could watch with torturing patience each swing of the long pendulum, had counted off ninety times sixty in its ticking, he began to realize that he had come upon a fool's errand and would better have sent his valet with the horse, instead of having him ride behind with two. It was evidently a great relief to the miller, whom he had vainly endeavored to question, when he complimented the gaunt woman on her tea and rolls, and took his departure.

"He is unnaturally careful of the girl," the prince thought, as he mounted his own horse at the door and rode away without so much as being asked to come again. But after riding half a mile he dismissed his valet, and turning sharp to the left, circled the mill, and reached the brook and the wild arbor by the lake. Everything whispered of her there as elsewhere, but nothing more; and after waiting, searching, and dreaming, till thoroughly weary of it, and possibly vexed withal, he turned away, shrugging his shoulders. No one had ever kept out of his way before; yet, strangely enough, this only added fuel to the fire, and fixed more firmly in his heart a curious fancy for Kathi Chichkini.

> "Retreating slow, with oft embarrassed pause,
> Forming with restless hands, unconsciously,
> Blank accident! Nothing's anomaly."

The major need not have trembled as he did, for surely there was not a man of the company who regretted his departure more than the prince, when he heard of it after returning from the mill.

"The major is an odd fellow," he said, "and always seems unhappy; but, after all, a better man at heart than Major Wolzonn one might seek far to find."

The days went more slowly after his departure, for in a quiet and solemn way he had done much more to brighten them than his friends had realized. Victor Reppoun was particularly glad their hunting-time was drawing to a close, for he was becoming thoroughly vexed with himself at the powerlessness with which he yielded once, twice, three times, and searched again for the spirit of the lake by the mill, though each time added to the number of failures.

The fourth time he looked in upon the arbor; the fourth time he found it empty; the fourth time he rode down to the lake, and that was unrippled by an oar. His horse stopped to drink. The water was low from the bank, and the horse in stretching his neck drew the rein from the rider's fingers; he sprang forward, caught them in time to save a repetition of his former misfortune, and—

"Oh, please, sire, don't!" exclaimed a clear, sweet voice, that had been ringing in his ears for a half month and more. She had been hidden by a clump of bushes, having just stepped from her little boat. In one hand she held the dripping boat-cord, in the other her push-off pole.

"I have found you at last, *ma petite!*" he cried, dismounting.

"Dear me! I thought you'd lost your way again, and were going to jump into the water."

"Rather, lady, I have found my way to your hiding-place." He bent forward to kiss her hand.

Quick as thought she dropped the push-off pole, hid her hand under her apron, gave his extended fingers a sharp cut with the boat-cord, made a merry courtesy, and explained: "Please, sire, it might not be just clean, you know." And she shook her head, and laughed at him.

For one moment at least, in the course of his life, the Prince von Meerschaum was at a loss for words.

"Don't you see, sire?" she asked a moment later, looking up as though she half enjoyed the thought that she had offended him.

He laughed outright as he answered: "I think I both see and feel. But come now, little one, make

up for this. Sit down here. I'll not kiss your hand, and you'll not strike me. But tell me about the books you've read, and what you'd like to read, and when I go back to St. Petersburg I'll send you a fresh supply."

"I don't mind that," said the girl lightly, fastening her boat-line, then sitting on the moss and grass while the prince lay at her feet, — pretty, slender feet, and so unlike the feet of Polish peasant girls, even cased in tiny shoes that were almost delicate, and pretty pink stockings. For two hours they hardly moved; and if, before, the prince had wondered that she knew so much of what he had learned, he wondered now that he knew so little of many things upon which she was well informed, till in his admiration he wholly forgot that the forest's child was but a peasant girl, or perhaps only a serf.

Ah, how many times our fairest Vestal Virgins forget to drink of that fountain of perpetual youth, and, like the Briganta Spendereccia of Siena, are too prodigal indeed of what they have, throwing their golden glories into the street from the windows, to attract at random any passer-by, nor stop to consider that, Briganta-like, famine, dearth, and empty coffers will ere long be displayed by nakedness! Blessed is that woman, and crowned with life-long adoration by the man she loves, who, though her silks be calico and her diamonds dew, is yet possessed of that magic cruse and priceless wine, a common-sense education, lavishing from which impoverisheth not!

Leaving the world of books and ancients, they wandered to the present. Then came the time for the prince to speak, and the brunette cheeks flushed,

and the black eyes shone, and the raven hair fell in careless beauty wherever a chance gust left it, as she listened to the glowing stories of the wide, wide world and of its golden glories.

"Dear me!" she cried, when he paused for a moment. "How I have longed to see the beautiful world you know so well! And do you live in a palace?"

"In a castle — a cream-white castle — a little way beyond the city to the north," he said.

"That's very like a story-book, isn't it, sire?"

"And the loveliest chapter of all is the living there," added the prince, with a low laugh.

"That is odd," said the girl, looking into his upturned face with a smile that he thought angelic.

"What is odd, my lady?"

"The way you are looking at me." And though that was not precisely what she had intended, it answered the purpose very well, for while she had been gazing upward into the thick shelter of forest-leaves, or through them into visions of the enchanted world that seemed to her nothing but glory and joy, a listless, longing, dreaming shadow, touched with maturity, overspread her face, — a shadow of womanhood in the warm summer fields of girlhood. Just as her eyes fell till they met his own, Victor Reppoun had whispered, "Oh, how heavenly beautiful!" That was what she meant as odd, and so indeed it was. But the prince made no answer; he hardly heard.

She shrugged her shoulders, and her merry laugh waked the hushed woodland into echoes. The spell was broken.

"I — I beg your pardon, lady, a thousand times. I —"

"Dear me, you frightened me!"

"Did I?" he asked; and she looked down again, as if expecting another fright, for his voice was so strangely soft and low, yet clear and penetrating to her very heart, which leaped like a startled doe before the hunter. She fancied it must be sweet as the voice of the proconsul Claudius whispering to the Druid priestess in the sacred grove under the holy moon. "I could not choose but look at you, you remind me so perfectly of a very near, very dear friend of mine, long ago gone up yonder, [he crossed himself,] whose name is sacred, and whose picture I could worship by that Santo Volto in the cathedral of Lucca, though the crafty priests say truly that Nicodemus himself cut it from memory of that eventful night. See, this is the picture!" He drew the medallion from about his neck, bowed his head reverently, crossed himself, and whispered, "Angel mother mine!—She was a Dane. Oh, how I loved her! My very life went out with hers. Had she lived in the land of Brahma, my greatest joy would have been to lie upon her funeral pyre. Years have veiled the bitterness, and another life, phœnix-like, came up from the ashes to take possession of me — a cold, heartless life, far more truly than the expression means to-day, '*un cœur glacé*.' Fairest, truest, purest of women, not time nor eternity can efface her image from my heart. Oh, that I could but emulate her loveliness of character!"

Kathi Chichkini bowed low over the medallion. "I should think, sire, you might well have loved her;" and flush answered to flush, outline to outline, eye to eye, till one seemed mirrored from the other through

the mists of half a lifetime. "She seems to remind me, too, of some one of long ago," she added; "but I am a Dane, and possibly that is all."

And the prince said to himself, in an exclamation literally fraught with amazement, "And God forgive me! this heart that never since has loved a lady, loves this counterpart of that medallion. Oh, bitter curse of being noble, that one cannot love and marry but under the brand of a title!" And aloud, yet not aloud, he repeated the Polish serenade:

> "The consummate of human bliss,
> The joy of heaven on earth were this:
> To win from lips so fair, so free,
> The boundless, endless luxury
> Born with a kiss;"

and, as the soft echo died away, that curious, irresistible silence fell over all. The air seemed heavy with the incense of Eros. The beautiful face was again absorbed in thought, and bent over the medallion. The temptation was not an instant old when yielded to. She dropped the medallion, springing to her feet. He rose from his knees, actually trembling as he remembered his promise, and wondered where the chastisement would be applied this time.

"Well, that was odd!" said she.

"And what was odd?" he asked.

"I thought you were talking to the medallion."

"And so I was."

"And kissing me?"

"And kissing you."

"Well, that was odd, wasn't it, sire?"

But before he could answer, every feature of the little face had changed. She started like a mountain

chamois on the rugged Jungfrau when a foot falls too heavily on the glacier of Gründelwald, or a cracking grass-stem, furlongs off, betrays a hunter.

"Hear that!" she whispered. "Papa the miller is pushing off his boat to come and look for me."

Prince Reppoun struggled in vain to catch the faintest sound, though a shudder crossing the girl's face told him the searcher was unwelcome; and all the strange incidents came back in an instant, as, muttering, "There is some mystery there," he placed himself between her and the lake.

"He will not hurt me," she said scornfully, answering the movement. "I've a good friend close by who would tear him all to pieces if he touched a single hair. I call him Cerberus, not because he has three heads, but because he is a dog; and I love him as much as if he had fifty."

Quick as thought two little brown fingers were pressed hard upon two rosy lips, and a shrill, piercing whistle shot across the lake. An instant, and a distant bark announced that Cerberus was on the path.

"Hear that!" and her eyes were radiant with the triumph of pride in the possession of that humble, powerful friend.

"And is there nothing, child, that *I* can do?" asked the Prince von Meerschaum, reluctant to be thus set aside for a one-headed Cerberus.

"Oh, yes indeed, sire; you can go away."

"I cannot." He stepped forward as a gallant defender should. "I will —"

"Please, sire, you will break my push-off pole; and I had much rather you would go away. He thinks Russian noblemen are a terrible set, that do nothing

but murder and rob, and everything bad and nothing good; and I don't know but they are."

This she said with such a laugh as he had seen when she had nearly upset him on the lake — a merry, malicious, meaning laugh, that made him grind his teeth and love her all the more.

"Then I go because you send me," he said, turning to mount; "but tell me first that I may see you again."

"If you look where I am, you will be sure to see me any time."

"And to-morrow, and here?"

"Please, sire, I tell you he will lock me in my room for a month if he knows you have been here; and by this time he can hear your voice, I think."

It was under a strange conflict of inclinations that he rode away. At the last moment he turned his head she was still watching him. The little brown fingers touched the rosy lips and tossed away a farewell kiss that had been waiting there; then such a peal of merry laughter sounded that he dashed the rowels deep into the black sides beneath him, muttering, "She has been playing with me, and laughs to think of the fool she has seen me make myself!"

The horse leaped forward under the argument. A huge dark mass came whirling toward him, in a literal cloud of leaves and moss and sticks, that left the motive power within hardly recognizable. The horse was going too fast to turn or stop, and sprang directly over it, while Cerberus, from the midst of it, gave a low growl.

The Prince Reppoun, provoked by the curious farewell that after all was but a happy freak of the child,

and, by an odd application, saved her being locked in her room for the month, went back to St. Petersburg without once more visiting the lake. Kathi Chichkini gave him just one opportunity to have seen her if he would. All the next day she spent very near the spot where they parted. Then she too became angry, and wondered if "Papa, the miller," was right, and avoided the spot till it was reported that the party of hunters had gone from the Round Lake.

If one may think that Kathi Chichkini did not care whether he came or not, they will be vastly mistaken; yet, after all, she of the two was the more sensible. Not even the miller suspected that she had a thought of him till a box of books reached the mill from some unknown source in St. Petersburg, and his sharp eyes read her heart. The books were all new, purchased, doubtless, and packed at a bookstore, (there were several such now opened at the capital, though when Paul's hand fell dead from the scepter not one bookstand was to be found in his entire domain;) and though the miller could not read a word, he scanned each volume carefully, arrived at the conclusion that no harm could come, and let his daughter read. No message came with the books; but at least the nobleman had kept his word, and Kathi Chichkini had no thought of asking any more. Possibly he too would come again some day. Surely she hoped he would; and as hour after hour swept rapidly away, beguiled by the entertaining volumes, she found oftener and oftener *his* face woven into the story, and that from the medallion even closer and clearer appearing with every page. They were two faces that grew into her heart, and rooted themselves there as firmly as life itself.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUMMER ENDING AT THE MOUTH OF HELL.

WHAT gloomy times those are! hours in every life that's lived, when mole-hills, too many of them, become ragged and high mountains, and we settle down into the opinion that for one cause or another we are of all men most miserable.

As the Countess von Kramareff's daughter had so sweetly warned Albrecht von Bremen at the ball, they had spent the summer, so much of it as had gone by, on the beautiful shores of Lake Liman, under the watchful eye of hoary Mont Blanc.

At first the young countess had thought herself particularly fortunate in thus securing a devoted lover for the season, and the undoubted refusal of a husband in the Fall; and she was quite of the opinion that she should be satisfied. The aged mother was very agreeable, as a high official had introduced the Count Albrecht von Bremen to her house. His title was good enough, though none too high. He appeared to have gold, though for that her daughter too had enough for both. She was, in fact, too happy to find that her daughter had apparently settled on something a little lower than the very high ambition she had warned her against, to make any objection whatever. People are apt to go to extremes too, and from guard-

ing her child so scrupulously till now, the daughter was suddenly allowed much more freedom than is generally granted in Russia. Hence the Dane von Bremen had a very satisfactory time of it, warmed and encouraged by the mother's approval and the daughter's good will. There came a time, however, when a hotel proprietor addressed a little note to Madame the Countess, asking if her daughter were actually to marry the Count Albrecht von Bremen, and if she were to hold herself responsible for the present bills he was contracting. The countess's eyes were altogether beyond reading, so that this, with all other letters, fell into the daughter's hands. It was not hard to make apologies to herself for this first variance from what might have been expected, yet the countess's daughter was tender-hearted, as may be remembered, on the subject of her mother's gold. Still it was only a first rebuff, and gradually wore away, though the letter was never answered, and Albrecht von Bremen soon announced that he had changed his hotel, which, for all its fine title, he found "a very uncomfortable place." The countess wondered why?

There came another blow, however, shortly afterward, and my lady lay upon a couch, one afternoon, in a richly furnished apartment, moaning, and thinking herself of all the world most miserable. She was quite alone. She would have smiled had even her nurse Elise been present, because, forsooth, she was all that was left of the house of Kramareff, and she proposed to "honor it as it should be honored," and not to cry at trifles such as this.

The afternoon was not far spent when the usual caller was announced. A moment sufficed to wipe

from her face every expression unbecoming in the daughter of old General and Count von Kramareff, and she swept into her mother's apartment with a stately grace that rested well upon her lovely form. The countess had not yet finished her after-coffee nap, but the rustle of her daughter's dress awoke her. The young woman, kneeling hastily, kissed her mother, as was well, but without further waiting sprang angrily upon the subject burning in her heart, flushing her cheeks, and lighting her eyes with a most unnatural fire.

"Mother!" she said, "the *Count* von Bremen calls again;" and the title was wound about in a bitter circumflex. "Now, mother, I have a favor to ask of you, and I beg with all my heart that you will grant it without a word."

"What is it, my daughter?"

"That I may speak to him alone; and as soon as you can well, leave us."

The countess held up her trembling hands in horror, and solemnly answered, "Never!". That might have settled it; but almost immediately she dropped from the high pitch of tragedy to add, "Is it not enough that he should ask me if he desire you, without bursting every limit of refinement to hear him yourself?"

"Aye! and what if I would not myself, nor yet have you accept that man while I have breath to breathe a 'NO'! Ah! he is a villain! a villain of the very deepest dye, mother." Her hands, that clasped her mother's, trembled with anger; her eyes were burning scorn.

"Child, I am old," said her mother, "speak slowly. I do not understand."

"Mother!" she cried, more excitedly than before, "I hardly understand myself. But this much I know: this Albrecht von Bremen is no more a count than I a queen. He is little if any better than a miserable lying pauper."

"Child, are you sure of what you say?"

"Aye, mother, I know it, every word."

"Then, how can you wish to see him at all, much less to be left alone with him?"

"Ah! but I burn to tell him that I know it, and bid him forever to be gone!"

"You are headstrong, child. Have you measured your thoughts?"

"Aye, mother dear, and know my will and the result of it. Come! let us have it over with."

Obeying, rather than yielding, the mother took her daughter's arm, and, a curiously stately pair, they entered the salon.

Now Albrecht von Bremen was fascinating to a dangerous degree, and during this summer he had exerted every faculty to make that danger as potent as possible. He was dove-like, but he was serpent-like too, as my lady had discovered, — one in appearance, the other in heart. In fact, we are all of us more or less triangular. One side of us we see ourselves, another side we show to our neighbor, and a truer side than either He sees who looks through the outward appearance on the heart. Among other additions which Albrecht von Bremen had made to the fascinations he offered was the sounding brass of "Count!" This he did without either leave or invita-

tion, though very much against the general usages of society; but even this he dared to do, and patted himself upon the back with the motto, "Only the brave deserve the fair," in its original from the Tartar serfs of Russia. "Fortune's wheel is always turning," he also repeated many times, and of late had fallen into the habit congratulatory of adding, "And now, my boy, all your life in the sky vaults and cellars is ending, ending in the wealth of a beautiful countess." And who shall say that a man who is an exquisite villain may not yet fall deeply and tenderly in love, even though gold were the magnet that drew him on? Shortly after the ladies had appeared in the salon, and the Dane had presented himself to them, in a momentary lull the countess's daughter, fearing her mother might yet have repented the half promise, made a pretext of music in the street below to go to the deep window-seat at the end of the room, where the Dane was only too ready to follow her, expecting in the course of things that the mother would follow too.

"What a soft air this the gods are granting us!" he said, — "soft, very soft."

"Indeed it is, Monsieur Count," said my lady. "One might almost think it the sweet breath of Circe wafted from Aeæa, so soft, so enchanting, so magical in changing everything, as it seems."

"In changing everything?" The Dane sought the depths of her dark eyes for a meaning, but they smiled on him as though Circe herself were looking down. He was right. A guilty conscience discovers quickly such a point. She had intended to open her attack with it, and only waited his reply to checkmate in just three deadly moves. But the Dane

noticed that the lady's mother had left the room, and delayed the game a little by inquiring:

"Is — er — is she ill?"

"No, Monsieur Count; I desired it."

"You — er — you desired it?" The Dane had already forgotten his momentary suspicion. His face was wreathed in smiles.

"I did desire it." She answered in a way that once more placed the game in a position to proceed.

"You — er — you — I do not understand you, lady; do not understand."

"Then, to be more explicit," said the lady, "by what authority are you a wealthy count, — beggar! Albrecht von Bremen?"

He groaned in response to this, much as Schicchi du Cavalcanti groaned in the face of Dante, charged with a similar crime, and for the first time in the presence of the countess's daughter he hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves. At last the herb of Mercury had vanquished Circe's sorceries.

"You understand me easily," she added.

"I understand your words, lady."

"And you know yourself."

"Two-and-forty years I have been studying," he said, with a faint smile.

"Then you know what I know, and how I despise you."

"And this without an explanation?"

"This will prove all you ask," she said. "Here, monsieur, is a full explanation." She scornfully tossed a pocket-journal at his feet, and wheeling

about with even more than usual dignity, she left him alone.

"By the great God, this is an explanation! — my own diary, full of state secrets!" he groaned as he stooped to pick it up. "Am I growing old, I wonder, that the world, for me, is unearthing such a host of blunders?"

He slipped into the hall, earnestly hoping that no one would notice his leave-taking; but a page waited by the stairs, and led him through the hall to the great door on the court.

Albrecht von Bremen was not a man of haste in passion. He moved slowly where others raved, dragging his words after him as though it were a burden for him to pronounce them. But his case was peculiar to-day. An overpowering desire seized him to wreak a vengeance upon something, were it never so meager, to be once more, as many times before, the victor. This being the victim was new to him, and disagreeable. It was thought and done. As the twisting, squirming, well-taught page threw the great doors open before him, the Dane carried out his new desire with the toe of his boot, and a screaming, howling boy, out on the marble pavement of the court, was the immediate result.

"Stop the howling!" the Dane whispered fiercely, bending over him. "Come now, to stop I'll give you a five-franc piece or another kick. What! five won't do it? Make it ten, then, — ten francs or two kicks. Now — er — now mind you stop!" The boy smothered his sobs in his coat-sleeve. "See how they glitter! Look! I — er — I drop them into the pocket of your — er — your — er — what is it? — bob-coat?

Yes, to be sure, bob-coat; very pretty bob-coat, — yes."

When the boy was in the hall again, and looked in the pocket of the very pretty bob-coat, and did not find the two bright five-franc pieces, he came to the philosophical conclusion that he might as well have taken his time leisurely, cried his cry out, and had just so many of life's tears shed, as to have trusted that man for either his five-franc pieces or his kicks. It had done its work, however, and the Dane rode away calmer by far for the loss of the surplus energy, and feeling nearer equal with the world as a whole, if not with the atoms composing it, — the story of the sparrow and the eagle over again.

Obedient to his order, the heavy coach-wheels that bore him rattled down the uneven pavement of the Rue du Mont Blanc, over the long bridge across the Rhone, past the little island to the right, where Pradier's statue of Rousseau now stands, and the ducks and geese and swans live in the boiling foam of the rushing river.

"How is it they say," muttered the Dane, "'Nine trip on the sill where one falls on the walk'? I think so, yes; but what of it? Tripping is not falling, nor is falling going down forever. 'Flames may be kindled while the taper burns.' H'm — yes. Better keep it burning, then, till the fire is started."

"I say, coacher, what are you stopping for?" he asked, as the sturdy, one-ideaed coachman appeared at the window with a broad, full face that almost filled the opening. One hand was upon the knob of the door, while the other grasped the brim of his great glazed hat as a wood-cutter would have grasped

the ax. His round, gray eyes looked a little mystified withal as he asked:

"And did you not say to the English Gardens and leave you there?"

"Did I? Oh — er — yes, I believe I did. Open the door for me. The scenery was so fine, I quite — er — yes, yes, — a pretty place is Interlachen."

The rough fingers clutched at the hat-brim in a sort of despair as the driver replied, "This Interlachen?"

"Oh — er — yes, I see. Let me out, I say! And what place is it, then?"

"Genevar, sir."

"Geneva — er — yes, Geneva. A pretty place is — er — er — yes, yes —" and turning sharply, he walked away.

"Geneva — *aw* — yes — aw — *Genevaw*," mused the driver, looking stupidly after him, and tapping his weather-beaten nose with his whip-handle. "And what sort o' man are ye, hey, as don't know Geneva*w* from Interlachen when you sees it, hey? Bein' yer forgetful, mayhap ye's forgotten some 'nothermore beside as I's had best remind you of."

Pulling the glazed hat hard over his forehead, and giving a cautionary look from under it to the old horse, who seemed in no haste to leave a bit of grass he could reach with the tip of his tongue, he spoke the inevitable "whoa!" thrust his whip into a "relief" in the trappings of the collar, and started at a clumsy run after Von Bremen. The Dane heard him coming, and purposely walked at such a pace that more than once the stiff-legged driver almost gave up the chase. It was a long, hard run for him; but in time, panting, his forehead covered with great beads of per-

spiration, he planted himself before his forgetful passenger, gasping, "Please, sir, ye's forgot — "

"Ah!" said the Dane, turning shortly enough to have annihilated one a whit less toughened and dull than he.

"But ye's forgot — "

"Forgotten what place this is? Why, Geneva, you knave! Geneva. You told me yourself, an — "

"The pay, the pay! *the pay!*"

"Oh — er — yes, I see, I see. I thought I told you I should want you to-morrow at the same time as to-day. Here is my card; come again to the hotel in the morning. I will — er — yes, I will pay you for both at once." Then looking into the driver's eyes with a fiendish grin, he added, "*Tomova la por* rosa, *mas devenia* cardo, *senor Vetturino*" (I took her for a rose, but she has proved a thorn), and left him.

The coachman stuffed the card into his pocket. Could he have read it he would have found it the name of a pawn-broking Israelite of the city. And muttering, "What sort o' gibberish is that, hey?" turned again to his horse.

When the Dane was nearly out of sight he cast a quick glance over his shoulder at the outwitted driver. He clinked the two five-franc pieces with his hand, that hung by the thumb in the pocket of his pantaloons, and with his head upon one side, he muttered: "I think I'll go back to Denmark. I'll start to-night. I'll wait until her anger cools before I speak again. Oh, that wretched journal! How came I to lose it? I've a mind I'll never keep another. That I have."

The countess's daughter too, after performing her feat of prodigious bravery, found herself almost power-

less in body and mind, and also much inclined to return to the north; and not many days later all that was left of the house of Kramareff was rattling and rolling along the dusty, sunbaked roads toward the far away capital of Russia.

By a chance meeting, Major Wolzonn had been for one day an occupant of their carriage. He was strolling restlessly about the world, trying to use up his summer. His courage had flagged before reaching St. Petersburg, and he had, after all, determined to wait till the prince returned from his hunting-trip, which would now be by the time he could reach the capital, and decide for himself on more positive evidence whether in fact he had seen more than a hermit and more than a horse. After coming to this conclusion, he wished himself back by the Round Lake as bitterly as he had wished himself away from it.

Rounding the hills, a small village came in view, quietly, almost lovingly lying on the rough breast, in the rugged arms of mountains frozen at the crown and clothed with evergreen about the base. Only a moment more and the heavy carriage drew up, not at a post-station, but at a village inn.

"This is the third time only that you have seen this spot," the countess said to her daughter. "It was a favorite with your father;" and mechanically the arm lifted the handkerchief, and the chronic tear came out to meet it. Major Wolzonn disliked those tears, and was inexpressibly thankful that at the moment he was stepping from the coach. He had been in a state of nervous prostration all summer, looking for something that never came, expecting it in every

noise and footfall, till the "sound of a falling leaf had chased him." In this same condition he found himself, though the evening was far spent, lying on a carpet of pine needles in the dense shadow of a mountain grove that touched the inn upon one side, and on the other, with but a few unimportant breaks, the melting snows of August. He had been long in that same position, for the red moon rising over the ragged peaks, and shining at last white and clear through breaks here and there in the branches, touched with brilliants little dewdrops gathered on his epaulets and silver sword-scabbard, when suddenly he was aware of a form stealing stealthily from the veranda of the inn, and crouching through the moonlight by a path skirting the grove. From his position he could easily see beneath the branches. He started to his feet, for no amount of disguising and crouching could hide from one so familiar as he, the tall, graceful figure of the countess's daughter. The rattle of his sword-harness startled her. He was a fool to have moved, he thought, but made the best of it by saying, "It is I, a friend, lady."

"Major Wolzonn!" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief and regret mingled. "I did not think to find you here."

"Where are you going, my lady?" he asked; then added quickly, "But never mind. You should not go alone. Let me follow at a distance, lady; something may happen when you may need my sword. I will see nothing, hear nothing, I swear by —"

"Tut! tut! No swearing in the moonlight. But come if you like, and keep your eyes and ears open if you will; only keep your lips closed afterward."

"Enough! They shall be hermetically sealed."

They walked together, she taking the lead, down a narrow path, he following, hardly so much as wondering what the end would be.

"Is it very late?" she asked.

"Not more than ten; but late enough. Are you frightened?"

"Ah, dear, no! I was only thinking. Stop! this is not the way. Ah, yes! here it is, this little path, — leading up the hill, I mean. What if we had passed it?"

"And how far does it lead up the hill?" asked the major, after they had been climbing long enough according to his fancy.

The lady laughed. "I believe that Major Wolzonn is a little bit afraid. Really, I do not know. I was here only once, once with the Duchess von Offenbach; I think that was the name; a lovely lady, though I have never met her since. There, it was just past this rock. And see — see it! We are already there."

"Already where, my lady?"

She laughed again. "I've just been waiting my patience out for that question. Why didn't you ask before? Have you no curiosity?" She leaned against the rock to rest for a moment, and turned that lovely face full upon his. Ah, the wild moonlight! how it enhances even the sweetest face! The officer trembled under the blow, for it was nothing less. He would have fallen on his knees, and touched his forehead to the ground in the serf's submission to this vision of splendor. He would have exhausted the vocabulary of love, and not have spoken

then the half that was cruelly crushed into the dungeons of his heart. But had he not sworn "by that fair hand" never again to speak of love? With almost superhuman will he thrust the opportunity behind him, and replied, "To the soldier curiosity is forbidden. His part is not to ask or reason, but to do and die." And the profound truth that he spoke, in its terrible application to himself, made his heart sick and faint, even in the moonlight, alone with one of the fairest women in the world.

"But to-night you are not a soldier, you are only a man," she answered.

Why did she tempt him? Was it not wonderful already that flesh and blood could withstand so much? Why did she thus redouble the agony? Probably she had not the least idea of what she did. With one more tremendous effort, turning his head that he might not see the face as he spoke, he answered:

"And you see I have already been enough of a man to ask."

"That is just like you. But tell me, do you believe in ghosts and witches?"

"Why? Have you seen a skeleton pass this way?"

"Pshaw! There's an old woman lives just over there, unless she's dead, a hundred years old at least, I know, and I really believe she can tell you everything of what your life has been, and what it will be."

The officer shuddered. He did not much fancy such an unfolding, but answered her lightly enough, "In truth, lady, I am not much of a believer in what

I cannot understand, but fond enough, after all, of mysteries. We will go on when you are rested."

The walls of a low-roofed hovel rose grim and forebodingly black against the sky. One would know, without being told, that it was the home of a wild Zenza. The very moonlight seemed to loath it, alone on the edge of a black forest. The first sight sent a shiver creeping through the soldier's veins.

"Will you knock?" asked the lady, seeing her companion hesitate after they had found the door.

"Yes, yes, I will," he replied, but could not move a hand. Cold sweat stood on his forehead not chilled by the wind. Long, quivering shadows stretched toward them from rocks and pine-trees. Snow fell with a muffled crash over some distant precipice, wrapped in its swaddling-clothes of clouds, and the silence that followed the echoes was stiller and more ghostly than before.

The countess's daughter stepped forward, and shame, not courage, drove the soldier to answer again, "Yes, yes, my lady, I will rap."

Three times he touched the door. The first he hardly heard himself, the last could not have roused a waiting ghost. He started back, muttered a curse that died upon his lips, and waited. A stranger, stronger terror seized him.

The signal was an open sesame, faint as it was. He saw the black door swing upon its hinges and disappear in blacker night. Mechanically he followed the lady, as she felt her way across the threshold, asking, "Helwig, is that you?"

"Helwig," squeaked a shrill voice that might have fallen from the ill-tuned throat of an eagle perched on

one of those distant crags, for all there was in it to indicate a near human being. "And who else could it be, living here at the mouth of hell, to tell people their comings?"

"Amen!" muttered Constantine Wolzonn. But once within the hut, the dank odor of long-burned drugs served in a measure to suffocate his fears. In a dreamy, half-cognizant state he stood with his eyes fixed on the moonlight as it shone upon the window, the only window of the miserable apartment.

"Do you know me?" asked the lady, who was yet far from satisfied.

"You?" cried the same voice again, still coming from far in the distance. "And it's few that I don't know, and few that I do know."

A little blue blaze sprang flickering up in a cup of oil. She held the cup above her head, and shaded her eyes with a hand whose long, huge-jointed fingers, black with burned sulphur and wrinkled with age, were tipped with curling finger-nails. And though she closed the fingers, the light still shone between the joints in irregular patches over her face. She advanced a pace, and even Lady von Kramareff fell back with a shudder as Urim prepared a reply.

"You!" she cried again. "Aye, aye! 'twas your father you asked me of; murdered, you told me, — and I you, — by a stripling whom you knew and your father loved." She nodded her head with a fiendish grin.

"Yes, Helwig, you know me, and I am faithful to-night; I believe you know everything. Take this and tell me what is coming. Tell me truly, and you shall have another when you are done."

Taking the coin, she held it under the light for an instant, then tossed it into a broken urn, muttering, "*Gold!*" with an unearthly chuckle.

She commenced her work of foretelling with a huge copper caldron remodeled to serve as a furnace, where soon the crackling of a fire was heard, and from which issued the thick white smoke of sulphur burning, as Yama Dehrmarajah Patala rode upward.

The jets of flame searched deeper into the corners than the lamplight, in one disclosing two ghastly bones, bleached white, hanging crossed above a pile of straw that formed the witch's bed; in another, pulling restlessly upon his chain, grinding a plum-stone between his teeth, grinned an ape, while before him two yellow eyes, glowing like coals of fire, marked the head of a large black cat.

Lady von Kramareff drew closer to the officer, trembling and starting in terror as the reflection from his glasses, that had fallen from his nose, danced about the room. She was under the terror now, and a wild chant the witch struck up was growing louder. She whined and cried like a southern hyena when the moon is rising out of the Syrian desert, and, throwing more sulphur on the fire, fell upon the floor in grotesque contortions. Old mother earth was the floor of her dwelling, and in her unintelligible incantations she seemed to be reproducing Gray's:

> "Facing to the northern clime,
> Thrice she traced the Runic rhyme;
> Thrice pronounced, in accents dread,
> The thrilling verse that wakes the dead;
> Till from out the hollow ground
> Slowly breathed a sullen sound."

At all events the sullen sound came at last, in the center of a charmed circle, but more in response to a heap of live coals she took from the caldron and dropped in the circle than in answer to her weird call. And the sound was followed by a shining brown head, with two small black eyes and a fiery red tongue. And the shining body of a snake followed it, and coiled in the circle as far as possible from the coals.

Inspired by the malicious, low glare in its eye, and told its tale in that solemn hiss, she ceased her chanting to watch it and listen, as the Hindoo soothsayers watch the evil eye of Sani.

"Aye, aye!" she cried, springing to her knees, and pointing a long crooked finger to the sulphur smoke that was slowly rising, "look there in the white smoke! Three boys are holding cages up and calling to a bird, 'Oh, my pretty, pretty!' She wants the food they offer, but cannot tell which of the three to enter. One calls to her, 'Come to me; for thy song and thy beauty I'll cherish and love thee.' No, no; she leaves him, and I thought she would; for he promised well, but his cage was the commonest cage of all." Then she swayed to and fro as though heart-broken over the depravity.

"Aye, aye!" cried the withered witch again. "Look there in the white smoke! Two boys are holding cages up and calling to a bird, 'Ah! my pretty, my pretty!' and one cries, 'Come to me, and a gay life of passion I shall give to thee.' Aye, she lights upon his cage. Ha! he grasped for her and missed her. Oh! oh!" She clasped her forehead between her palms and swung as a weaver at his loom.

"He cursed his luck when he lost her, that he had not her wings and her tail to sell in the market. Ha! ha! ha! that was a gay life, sure, and to be sure.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, as the snake began to sway from side to side; seeing which, the ape in the corner crouched, shivering, behind his chain. The snake sat erect; the ape went on crunching his everlasting plum-stone. The old woman sought another picture in the white smoke that now came more slowly and in irregular puffs.

"Look there!" she cried once more. "One boy alone. His cage is on the ground. He says, 'Go in, if you wish to. I would have a bird to sing, and why not you if you sing well;' and — aye, aye! she has gone straight into his cage! Lackaday for it, too! But 'tis always so. Ah! and I see another picture. He cared not enough for his bird to shut the door, yet I see her struggling, struggling, struggling against the wires, and on beyond I see where winds are blowing and fierce tempests howling. I see an escape, and a capture by another. I see — I see bright feathers floating everywhere. I see the wings and the tail in the market, and the market is at the bottom of a raging sea. Look! catch it! It leaves me. It is — perhaps it is all a false dream, my lady. Time shall try. But my fire is almost dead. Give me your gold if you are satisfied, and go your way."

Major Wolzonn gave the gold this time. Strangely, perhaps, he had a very kindly feeling toward that mysterious hag, and mentally resolved to visit her alone some day. And that night, long after to be remembered, was almost forgotten even before they reached the inn. The major's lips were sworn to

silence. The countess's daughter did not choose to speak.

The prophecy made but little impression; and no sooner had the Kramareffs reached St. Petersburg than Heinrich Charlovitz, a Greek priest related to the family and upon terms of intimacy, was taken into the confidence of the countess and her daughter to accomplish that end which, in truth, had been the first proposed, the one which Elise had failed to hear. A desperate effort was to be made for the high aim which alone seemed to promise satisfaction to the daughter, the success of which was so very doubtful in the mind of the mother. Heinrich Charlovitz, with the cunning hand of a priest, and the pretty face of the countess's daughter, surprised the mother's fears.

CHAPTER X.

THE SERPENT TEMPTED ME, AND I DID EAT.

IMMEDIATELY on reaching the capital, Major Wolzonn, too, had work to do. It took him at once to Castle Foam. The prince was away. The great gates on the highway were closed. The officer in vain questioned the lodge-man as to the whereabouts of his master. He had returned from his hunt nearly a month before, had remained at home two weeks and gone again; gone in his own calèche, four horses, a driver, a valet, and two saddles. That was the only information.

Something induced Major Wolzonn to leave the capital on horseback before daylight next morning, and drive thirty versts to the post-station beyond the fork in the roads, where the southern and eastern ways separate. There he stopped overnight, though it was altogether unnecessary, and asked incidentally if the Prince von Meerschaum had passed that way southward, and not returned, within the present month. Receiving an affirmative answer, he started early the next morning for the capital again, after passing a sleepless night; dictated a letter, with many a pungent frown, and carried it in haste to the wharves, where a certain vessel of extraordinary appearance, painted black, with blood-red sails, and

christened "Midnight," was all ready to sail for a trading-port upon a coast below.

The master of the boat nodded as the officer stepped aboard, and though he took no immediate notice beyond the nod, he very soon found himself in an obscure corner far forward, very sure that the officer would almost immediately pass him. This was done; the officer handed him the letter without a word. The captain took it without a word, and the officer was gone. The "Midnight" sailed, and in time cast anchor in a small, half-sheltered harbor on the coast of Denmark. A hunchback sat astride one of the braces of the pier, his legs, the only regular thing in his entire make-up, swinging free in the salt air, as if to say, "Look here! so much of me is as good as any man; and for the rest, 'faith, I may be better, for aught you know."

The captain passed the hunchback with a nod, much the same sort of a nod as he had bestowed on Major Wolzonn; nothing more, except that as he passed he dropped a small leather bag close behind him. The hunchback did not move directly, except to pick up the leather bag and deposit it in his lap. In time, however, he slowly wriggled up, and slowly, very slowly, wriggled away from the pier and up the hill behind it.

A London fog, of old-time London, hung over the little seaport town, the gray, old, dingy, crumbling town. An old-fashioned Londoner would have declared it only a fragment broken from the great English capital cloud, as it drifted in heavy masses with every varying breath from the water, till the gray-blue walls of the houses dripped like the walls of the blue grotto at Capri. Sunset, the clock said; but

what of it? Since noon the houses across the narrow streets had been invisible. The "Midnight" had been all day working her way into the harbor. Only now and then the clamp of the spoon-shod mule broke the damp, dead silence. A quiet, dull old town in its best estate, and nicknamed "L'Ennuyeux," it was tenfold more worthy the name in a time like this.

After pushing his way through fog-banks and narrow streets, where the only lights to be seen looked like meteors thousands of miles away, with a misty halo about each of them, the hunchback turned into a narrower alley, where not a light was to be seen from any distance. The gray of daylight had given place to the blackest of night, and a thin, ill-shapen hand slid along the wall of the alley, to detect by some sign or other the spot where a door was to be found. It was still there, and the hunchback entered and began laboriously climbing up flight after flight of uneven stone stairs, worn down in ruts, where for many a year wooden shoes, large ones and small ones, had clattered over them. For a score of families found nests for themselves in the small double rooms, and still smaller single rooms, opening on that stone staircase. The little hunchback did not stop at any landing, where lamplight or firelight twinkled through keyhole or crack, but kept on and on till he stood before the dingy, smoking lantern that hung at the head of the third landing. There he paused for a moment, with more of a grunt than a sigh, and twisting a bit of paper, lit it at the lantern, shaded it with his hand, and climbed on. The blue flickering light with its blue-black shadows, and the pink lines between the fingers that carefully shielded it, and the white and

black blur of the face that bent over it, made an odd little picture, but the hunchback was past minding that. The steps grew smoother as he crept higher, and, with the light to aid him, he soon reached the fifth landing, where only two doors presented themselves, leading to two little dove-cotes under the eaves. On one of these doors he rapped, but entered without waiting a reply. A little ill-trimmed lamp was burning on a table. It lit up the room with a ghostly hue, this little neglected lamp, disclosing four walls, two of stone, two of plaster, bare stone and bare plaster, and a floor of tile as hard, bare, and cold as the walls; a rude bedstead, a chair, a high stool, a wooden table, and two or three cumbersome boxes. That was all, except the occupant. He sat in the chair, his arm thrown upon the table with the easy grace of long acquaintance with luxury. A heavy seal ring graced one of the extended fingers, and his costume was precise to the latest fashion in the gay world, and elegant. A portfolio lay open before him. He had been amusing himself with his pen. The result lay in the best light of the poor lamp: two companion sketches on a large sheet of paper. One of a man (doubtless in spirit himself), merry and animated, in a regal apartment, bending over a beautiful lady. The other was of the same man in just such another as this little stone room under the eaves. Beneath them he had written:

"Life is a golden goblet
Brimming with wine;
Now quaff I right royally
The sparkling foam,
And now, the bitter of the dregs,
They shall be thine."

He did not even notice the entrance of the hunchback. He was looking at the picture. Nervously tapping the table with his fingers, he moaned, "When will this everlasting almost end in one success? Oh, Arnus of Etruria, say some better sooth for me!"

"What's he been doing to you now?" squeaked the hunchback, in that shrill falsetto so common when the lungs are drawn all out of position.

"Ha! Little one, what business have you there?" said the elegant, still frowning from the "bitter dregs."

"What you thinking of? — that girl, I'll be bound," replied the hunchback, giving no heed to the question.

"How soon will you obey me," said the other, springing to his feet, "and hold your crazy tongue?"

"Dreamed more 'n once of late that there's ill luck for you in that quarter. It's no good comes from such — "

"Hold your tongue, or I'll choke you!" roared the seal-ring.

"No, you won't. You aren't able, and you wouldn't do it if you could," observed the hunchback, complacently, and added, after a moment's pause, "But if that's the mood you're in to-night, I'm blessed if it's any pleasanter drying up in here than soaking outside, so out I go."

"Yes, go, for that is just the mood I'm in to-night;" and he leaned back upon the table again, with a heavy sigh.

The boy had almost closed the door again when he turned, threw the leather bag into the room, explaining, "'Midnight' brought. I'd 'most forgot," and slammed the door behind him.

"H'm," observed the solitary occupant, walking slowly across the room, then picking up the sack and emptying upon the table a half dozen letters. "Your bump of memory is with the rest of your brains down between your shoulders. But a capital fellow you are for some things, after all, and keep a secret better than a priest. I should miss you sadly if you were to die, but there's no fear of that, for hunchbacks never do."

From several of the letters he took money, with a grim smile stirred up by satisfaction; two he threw upon the floor, then drew the lamp nearer and began to read carefully the one he had saved till last. Slowly he read, and slowly every feature of his calm face changed, till, having finished, he hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves; and while he crumpled the paper fiercely in his hand, a volley of untrammeled curses burst from his lips like thunder from the summer clouds. He held it over the lamp till all was consumed but the corner in his fingers. That bit he threw away. It fell by the lamp, and on the half turned upward one word was written, and that word — "Wolzonn."

What a grand or gloomy mausoleum, covered over with hieroglyphics like the monuments of Karnak and Luxor, thronged with weird and withered mummies like Thebes and Abydos, rises as a mental mirage with that strange spell, a name!

When the storm of oaths had spent itself, the head fell wearily down on the folded arms. "So Reppoun has found her," he muttered, "and gone again to complete his discoveries. He is bold; he is honest. *Fool!* Lord Count Olendorff, your little plans and mine are

like to be buried with the cities of the plain. Thank Fortune, I was bright enough not to do the work myself, for some one will sweat for it. Good Lord, deliver me!"

Then he was silent, — a long time silent, — and the fog drifted outside and the lamp flickered inside, till the fog drifted itself away without and the lamp flickered itself out within, and the moon shone over the ragged red tile roofs and through a little window. It marched slowly over the floor, crept up the bent back, over the bowed head, off the extended finger-tips, and then disappeared again, and the air was filled with the gray light of dawning when the head was lifted.

"H'm," said the owner, "I must have been asleep! Yes, that was a bad dream! Curse it! very bad! What a vicious smell hereabout! And my light is out! I did not put it out—no! Ugh! having my arm sawn off by the Prince Reppoun and Kathi Chichkini, while Major Wolzonn and the Countess Kramareff held me! Ugh! my arm is asleep, — that is the trouble."

He shoved the window open, and, invigorated by the fresh air, stepped into the corner of the room; there he drew a false plaster from around a block of stone forming a part of the wall, fitted a ring and staple into it, drew the stone from its place, and into a dubious-looking hole which it disclosed drew his head and shoulders after his feet, that had preceded them. At length he emerged, covered with dust, but bearing a heaping handful of gold in his palms. He threw the coins on the table, replaced the stone and false plaster, then turning, addressed the yellow pile:

"If you don't do it, there's many times more in there that will." So he was a miser withal. "There's force in the old Spanish proverb, that there's no lock but a golden key will open. If Kathi Chichkini fail me, then you must win for me the daughter of Count von Kramareff." He nodded his head slowly, and hung his hands in the pockets of his pantaloons.

Now all of this disturbance was caused by nothing more or less than the over quick suspicion of Major Wolzonn's nervously wearied mind; and yet there was some truth in it all.

It was true that the prince had left his castle suddenly, and had told no one where he was going or when he would return. This oversight, by the way, caused the fat old butler no small inconvenience. He had always heretofore been intrusted with just so much of information, and had been the "popular man" in the house till it all had been urged out of him. This time having received no information, and being much chagrined, he lied. To lie, and sustain his lies, was the inconvenient part.

It was also true that the prince had started toward Poland, and when the major stopped at the post-station the prince was entering a little nest of five-and-twenty houses, ancient in architecture, brown inside and out — yellow-brown as a ripe russet rind. The narrow street had low eaves stretching over it; there were rough stones for paving-stones — broken and ragged stones. There were goats wandering up and down, free as the west wind; swarms of gnats and buzzing flies lying in the warm sun like beads of black poised in the mid-air, neither rising nor falling. There were men sitting in the doorways, forlorn as

the crumbling old timbers about them. The women were all gone out to work, hoeing and reaping, raising just enough to last till summer came again, — no more, for it would only have been wasted, and what was the good of that? All this was Arantha, unfamous village, from which, however, comes the famed perforated wood-work that has become itself famous, if not the men who stay at home all day to make it while the women sow and reap for them.

The village inn, which was also the post-station, boasted five rooms in all, — three on the ground-floor, two under the straw. This made a large inn, — too large for Arantha. The whole house was thrown open to the prince, though he traveled strictly incognito. There was a nobility in his bearing more potent even than his title; but, much to the regret of the fat and gouty official, and in fact to the regret of every man in the village, (for they all turned out to see the new-comer,) he chose one of the little rooms under the eaves, — the one looking westward. Why? Far away, over the green forest, the tips of the long white arms of a windmill were visible chasing each other round and round in a never-ending race. While the Prince von Meerschaum sat in the little window, the shadows lengthened into long, black lines, all pointing from the mill toward the inn, and objects down below became more and more indistinct and gray. The hand-cart in the yard, with the chickens roosting upon it, — the dog gone to sleep in the deserted coop, his head thrust through a hole in the side of it, — the mound of grain, at which a donkey and a goat had been nibbling, because they knew they would be driven away if caught at it, — the stagnant, green-

coated pond, where the fern and wild rush flourished, and its circle of black water at one end, where ducks had been skirmishing, — all at last were one with the twilight. The clatter and the chatter of the women and the children coming home subsided, and one by one the stars appeared, — "the beautiful evening star" and her train after her, — till in the infinite dome all the stars of the summer night twinkled, and the moon tipped with silver every leaf that shivered in the night-wind. A night-bird whistled to his mate, and from far away millward the mate whistled back to him, and a hawk or an eagle, belated, screamed from up heavenward.

In the window-seat lay an open journal, and watching a linden-leaf, Victor Reppoun whispered half in prayer, "Ah! that the fingers that pressed this were noble! She should fill my halls, as she fills my heart, with the beautiful face of my mother."

As the sun crossed the meridian the next day, the prince, alone, upon horseback, skirted the mill in a wide circle, saying, "I'm come not to visit you to-day, miller friend of mine, so pray grind away on your grist, and do not disturb yourself or me."

The long white arms swung on obediently, and the speaker soon found himself by the grotto that had become such an important corner in his life; the gurgling brook and the mossy log looked lonely and bare; for a charm was wanting that would have made Sahara fair as the garden of the Euphrates. He sought further. A merry laugh drew him toward the lake. A little nearer, and the prattle of a tongue he had longed to hear roused the dubious question,

"Who is she talking with? Has she found another dismounted wanderer?" He urged his horse close upon the lake-shore and drew the limbs one side.

Oh, world of swift vicissitudes! "Ha!" he exclaimed, "I took her for a type of innocence. I worshiped her as such. I find her no novice after all, but see her treating another man to the same artfulness with which she conquered me. Oh, oh! what a fool I am to place a confidence in woman!" Which was altogether as unjust as it was cruel; but how many unjust and cruel things we do in the course of a lifetime that seem to us right magnanimous at the time!

A hollow, cold, metallic laugh was his final comment. Those in the boat heard it, started, listened for an instant, then went on with their talking.

Returning to the arbor, Victor Reppoun threw the reins carelessly over a limb and himself upon the log cushioned with wiry moss.

At first he was disposed to open rebellion. "Some evil spirit," he murmured, "grumbling that my castle home was such a happy spot, has mixed a cup with poison. Bahr Sheitan, the spray of thy water is bitter." Gradually he subsided into melancholy. "No, no. I am not created with a heart to love; not even a peasant-girl. I am branded, and forbidden what many taste. I overstepped the limit of my life, and this first misery in many years is because the Serpent tempted me." Then came the moralizing mood. He had nothing to call him away, nothing to interrupt the natural course of metaphysical wandering; and this stage was marked by a summing up in the old serf lyric that was once the great hymn of the down-trodden:

"'Living is best to live,
That so the seed may lie
For yonder reaping-time to give
Good harvest by-and-by.'"

Then came repose, and the head fell back upon the arms on the moss cushion. Bright-winged foresters chanted and caroled above him. Soft and silvery bubbling music welled from the richest of harps that nature plays upon, as it sparkled on its mission through ferns and grasses: and white-bells and blue-bells drooped on the slender stems till their waxen petals touched and kissed the laughing billows, never asking how many blue-bells had been kissed before, nor telling how many billows they should kiss afterward. Dreamily the long-leaved ferns swayed in the summer breath. Quivering, limpid sunlight trickling through the leafy canopy, fell like beads of gold on the soft moss carpeting. Many-fingered, trailing vines wound in and out among the branches drooping lowest from the trees, and the breath from the flowers that floated through the arbor seemed burdened with Olympian odors. Like Lethean dew the fragrance hung heavy upon the senses of its victim, till from reverie he wandered into dream-land, fancy after fancy still enticing him, goddesses of dream-land taking up the silver cord and leading on.

So quietly this occurred, that never dreaming he had dreamed at all, he opened his eyes again half an hour afterward. The mists of dream broke slowly into the sunlight of reality, for there was something peculiar, not shocking, as oftentimes, but very like dream-land in the reality. As his senses returned he became conscious of a gentle voice not very far away,

murmuring something to no one in particular. Then his eyes opened, and the picture was still peculiar. Across his saddle hung a wreath of forest-leaves. The black, flowing mane of his horse was braided with white-bells. Here and there a drop of water sparkled on the hair, and the voice said, "That is very odd. Papa the miller charged me so solemnly the last time *he* was here, to keep well out of his way forever. I think I would run if he should wake up, for maybe papa the miller is right, but here I have made sure and got well into his way instead. I wonder if he can be such a terrible villain? I don't believe it — not a word of it; and if I'd known that he was here I wouldn't have waited half so long for Signor Giovanni to paint the mill, for all papa told me to. I think he likes Signor Giovanni just because he is not a nobleman. Yes, it is odd. The first time I see him he is half drowned in a brook; the last time he is sound asleep on a log hardly so large around as he himself; and that's not the oddest either."

The temptation was too great. The eyes opened wide, and the prince, leaning on his elbow, asked, with a smile that betrayed more of his admiration than he would have ventured to confess even to himself, "And what is the oddest of all, *ma petite?*"

With a startled cry she shrank back against a great tree-trunk, as though it would protect her little self from anything; aye, cover her, if need be, with its great ragged husk. And why not? Was she not the child of those forest-trees? — their foundling? Long, bright days with them, and even long starry nights with them, year in and year out, winter and summer with them, calling each one by a name,

worshiping in them mother, father, brother, sister, aye, God too, sometimes; they seemed such strong, protecting, omnipotent things, did it not constitute them hers, and she their child? What was more natural then, when suddenly finding herself in such an unmaidenly, perhaps dangerous predicament, than that she should fly for help to a hard-hearted, gnarled, and rugged, rough-skinned forest king? Was she not his child?

How beautiful she, cringing there, her eyes upon the ground, her cheeks bright with a tinge of shame and fear, her fingers idly playing with the flowers gathered in her apron, the Prince Reppoun alone could tell; but father and daughter, the powerful and the helpless, made a picture that melted into a warm, full summer lake even "*Le cœur glacé.*"

More than a week went by, hastened by frequent and long meetings, yet neither knew more of the other than that each in their own peculiar fashion loved the other, though neither had spoken such a word as "love." From her suspicion that all noblemen were what her "papa the miller" had been pleased to call them, Kathi Chichkini began to wonder that this first romance of her life had been so utterly different from all of which her limited reading, and more limited hearing, had given her any insight. The prince had not so much as kissed her hand again, and while her adoration was quite content to bask in the sunlight of his presence, content to live, knowing he was not far away, perfectly happy if so be he smiled, which he often did, yet in spite of the very prim notions of life with which the good priest Arantha had inspired her, and which the miller had warmly

seconded, she was sometimes tempted to wish she had not struck him quite so hard with her boat-rope, and made up her mind, with as much force as was her wont, that the miller was entirely mistaken.

It was just this impression which Victor Reppoun intended to convey, and for more than one reason. He had plainly seen that the girl's mind was prejudiced for some cause, good or bad, by "Papa the miller." He had an insane idea, too, that he could see her for a week, satisfy the strange feeling of admiration she had aroused, and leave her as happy or happier than he had found her, if he spoke nothing, acted nothing that should so much as intimate more than passing pleasure in her company. Giving himself certain license, certain restraint in these set bounds, he had been wonderfully happy. He had not found a peasant girl, but one in mind very nearly an equal, while in body possessing all the charms of rare and refined beauty untarnished by the falsifying world. Unconsciously he had been too happy, and as the thought pressed itself upon his mind that he must return to his castle, that the summer would shortly be gone, and that a post-station was not a place that could long shelter a prince without question, another accompanied it to the end that if out of her sight there would always be a longing, always an emptiness where his heart should be.

She had indeed grown daily more lovely, as one such must in the presence of the polished Prince von Meerschaum. Alas! she was a low-born country-girl, while the name of Reppoun was older than the foundations of Russia, and that of Meerschaum almost twin-born with St. Petersburg, without a drop of low-

born blood in all the line: so thought the prince. He was certainly no man to do a cruel thing, little as Russia's morality was educated, and yet — !

Just this turn of thought, "and yet," the prince had been struggling with himself to conquer and arrive at some conclusion, as he took the narrow lane leading behind the mill and lake for that hour, happiest of the day, when he was to meet her by the arbor. "Ah!" he exclaimed, while his heart beat fast, "there is not a life in Russia to compare with that, and yet, because that is not titled, I — ! Away! Yet how could it be a cruelty to better her position a hundredfold? I will at least lift her from this desolation. I will take her to St. Petersburg, where she shall know to her satisfaction all there is to know, live in royal style, and enjoy life to the full. Curses on nobility that I cannot marry her!"

With Kathi Chichkini the feeling was strangely similar and dissimilar; and this morning, too, put her heart to the test. The miller had been to the village the night before to inspect this stranger of whom he had heard much report. He had been petrified to find him the same stranger of whom he had been warned before by two, who, he rightfully or wrongfully considered, had a right to warn him. In the morning Kathi had been questioned sharply. Her nature rebelled at an untruth. She frankly told him she had seen the nobleman and found him very agreeable. The miller began to rave madly with his tongue, and stamp the floor with his heavy, home-made boots. This was what she had looked for and hoped for, — a bit of diplomacy, if you please. The little body, great Cerberus close beside her, reprimanded the mil-

ler, calling him not "Papa," but by his given name, as one having authority. She cunningly and with amusing dignity, not without majesty after all, declined to say more to him on any subject whatever, retired to her room with Cerberus, requesting the miller, as she went, to lock the door as of old upon the outside, — "as," she added, "I shall lock it on the inside, and keep it locked till I am ready to come out."

The threat she carried out. Indeed, she kept the door locked longer, for it was still fast when she met the prince upon the lake. Possibly Cerberus could have told how it all came about; at all events, when the miller, quite broken-hearted, knocked on the door to beg the child to forgive him, the dog answered, as if fully equal to the situation, with such a low, suggestive growl, that he went away again, saying, "Lord, she is angry enough this time, sure; but how could I help it?"

The thought uppermost in Kathi Chichkini's mind was not, however, of her confinement; she cared very little for that; but that it was a bar upon her seeing more of one who had become almost a god to her.

This was the bitter blow. Her life, a desert, with but a chance oasis here and there, in book or prayer, a long association with the illiterate and uneducated, though she bore it with a simple virtue that made her the Angel of Arantha, was yet hard at the best, doubly hard in prospect, since for a week it had blossomed like a rose. Her thoughts, as she waited for the prince, were sad enough, for when they parted now, she must tell him it must be the last. Deceit

was doubtless within her power, strategy at least, but not within the choices of her life. So far from it, that she had nerved herself to sacrifice the pleasure she had so innocently enjoyed, rather than deceive further even the old miller of Arantha.

"Look, how the lake sparkles in the sun!" she said to him, after the first commonplace greetings were over. A stubborn sob died on her lips, where it met a spirit stronger than the flesh.

"I cannot look at it, my lady. To do it I must take my eyes from you."

He had never spoken such words, nor in such a voice before. Why did he choose to-day? It would make the parting as much more bitter as the words were sweet to her; and yet at the words her heart gave a happy bound, that had lain as heavy as lead before. She looked up, much as she would have said "Thank you" had he said, "What a pretty dress you have!" She was happy that she had pleased him. She did not dream that he loved her; he had given her no cause for that, and indeed she was sensible withal. It was plain that he enjoyed the hour or two each day that he spent with her, and she alone knew how earnestly her task had been performed to make herself pleasing; for from the first joy of novelty he had rapidly become all in all to her, which she fully comprehended. She knew that she loved him just as noble ladies loved, or as she supposed they loved, with all her heart and life, never dreaming, however, of more reward than such a look and smile as that bestowed with his last words. Both happier and sadder she looked up, a deep blush making her cheek more beautiful as she courtesied in the

quaint peasant style, and answered in her own quaint style:

"That's odd, sire."

She had not seemed like herself before, and the prince hailed with delight this return.

"And what is it now?" he asked.

"You are rather odd yourself," she replied, struggling hard to drag a smile through the tears that crowded on the threshold. "I wish I were a man."

"And what would you do?"

"I know what I would not be, whatever I might do to accomplish it. I would not be a peasant."

"And what then? A seigneur?"

"No, sire. I despise that man who holds the soul of an equal beneath his heel. But I would be a savant."

It was a bold speech for the little statesman, but a speech which had a meaning deeper than a passing "hate," as she proved afterward.

The prince might have argued the policy of serfdom, might have declared that his and many serfs were better, far better off than they could be otherwise, might have said a hundred things in justification, but his thoughts were otherwise bent.

"Do you know, *ma petite*," he continued, after a moment's thought how best to say what he had to say, "I am not at all sorry that you are not a man?"

"And why not, sire?"

"Because I am selfish. Because there lacks but one thing to make my happiness complete, or make me altogether unhappy — "

What was it that so suddenly made her cheeks burn

like live coals, and her heart beat hard, almost hard enough to burst the peasant bodice? Not even in the moonlight, all alone, had she dared to dream it. Were the prison-bars breaking? Were the shackles falling off? Was the world and freedom coming to her feet?

"Can one thing be so powerful?" she asked, hardly knowing whether she spoke or what she said, for some madness of joy whispered in her heart that it was Kathi Chichkini.

"One little thing, only one, — only this, to have you near me forever, beautiful Kathi Chichkini."

Ah! the world floated and swam about her, dazzlingly beautiful, yet all unseen. The great tree against which she was leaning seemed shrinking away from her. Let it go. She had no more need of it. She saw but one figure before her, — how strong! how noble! She felt his powerful arm about her, she did not shrink from it. That was her consent. He pressed a kiss on her burning cheek. Why should she prevent it? The dreary past shrank like a dark spirit before the bright future. He supported her better than the trees; he could protect her better. In all the endearing names she had ever called them, "lover," "husband," had never sounded. She could leave them all without a sigh for

> "A nearer one still,
> And a dearer one
> Yet, than all other."

So after all there was to be no bitter pang of parting, no life-long heartaches for the bright, brief joy of the past summer time.

"Me!" she whispered at last, when to still the beat-

ing of her heart she must say something. "Take me with you to the capital?"

"To St. Petersburg, dear one; will you go?"

She looked up with those large, black eyes, from whence distrust had long ago vanished. He averted his face, for a shadow of shame stung him withal.

"And live in a real city?" She clasped his hand in hers. His hand was cold, icy cold. It almost made her shiver.

"In a real city, *ma petite*."

"And see the grand sights you have told me of?"

"And live in grand apartments."

"And have you near me?" she whispered.

"Till the grave covers me."

"And — and — " Her voice dropped so low that he leaned forward, till his face touched hers, to catch the words. "And — "

"And what, bright angel mine?"

"And be — your wife?"

By some strange instinct she loosed her clasp from the cold hand. It fell like lead. The prince staggered, muttered to himself, "Good God! she does not understand me;" then summoning all the strength that would serve him in such an unwonted emergency, he fell upon one knee, already in an attitude to beg for mercy, and gasped, "Everything, lady mine! All shall be yours! My wealth, and all that it will bring you. Myself, my only love, my *all*, except my name. Alas! that I cannot give — "

Who was that that stood before him? A faint cry caused him to lift his eyes that would rather have rested on the ground, and the word he would have spoken fell dead upon his tongue. Where was the timid,

half frightened peasant girl that a moment before had lain so full of confidence in his embrace? Gone! Who stood there in her place? It was Kathi Chichkini still, but a proud, insulted woman, with an imperious gesture bidding him be silent. Pale and cold she stood there, those black eyes buried in his very heart.

She spoke at last, her little hand still extended, and every feature of her face interlaced with scorn. "I thought, sire," she said, "that you were a nobleman, and that you loved a mother. Beware her wrath, for she was a woman too."

She turned from him like the changing wind. Before he could speak a word of defense, had there been one, she was shooting over the lake in her light canoe.

"Oh, heavens! why did I say it?" he cried in despair. "Why did I throw a pearl away richer than all her kind?"

Long and silently Victor Reppoun stood there, looking after the retreating figure. Long, long did clouds of remorse and shame darken every prospect of his life. Long he repented in sackcloth and ashes; and long after the canoe and the rower, and the old mill yonder, were out of sight and far away, he beat his breast, and cried again, "Yes! yes! it was the serpent that tempted me, and the more's the bitter shame for me that I did eat."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WORLD SHALL SEE A PRINCESS OVER CASTLE FOAM.

"'Life de bonair is everywhere,
And yet a charm is wanting there,'"

SAID the Prince Reppoun, as he sat smoking with Heinrich Charlovitz, shortly after his return from the second trip to Poland, and the person addressed answered frankly, and yet as may appear to some deceitfully, "I think the prince should have a wife."

Now Heinrich Charlovitz was, in some respects, what is commonly called "a character;" in other respects he was thoroughly "a man;" and still a third side of him presented a most excellent priest. He was young, younger than the prince by a few years, and this enviable parish was his first. He was father in sacred things over the little village of Schaumburg, just below the castle; Schaumburg, so christened by Peter the Great himself, a lovely little village, built in exact facsimile of the great Petersburg, as it was in those early days. Father Charlovitz was nobly born, which, perhaps, accounted in some measure for this first success. He was exceedingly ambitious withal, and had made his first duty, beyond the limits of the little church, that of fastening himself in cordial friendship

to the master of the castle. This was easily accomplished, for Heinrich Charlovitz was in every way an attractive, entertaining man, and Victor Reppoun thought much of him. He laughed at the priest's comment, and answered:

"I tell you, father, my chances are poor. I know of none that please me, even supposing I pleased them."

The priest smiled. He had marvelously white teeth; they shone like ivory when he smiled.

"My lord is looking at buds," he said, "and comparing them with flowers that have blossomed for other men. They too were buds, and other buds will blossom, if my lord transplants them, till they surprise him with their beauty. But let me say this much, my lord: Brightest in bud is not best in flower. The sacred lotos of the Nile, the Syrian valley-lily, are of the most uncomely budlings. The virgin Queen Elizabeth was in her girlhood called 'The Homely;' and Marie Antoinette, 'La Grossière;' but England's court and the paradise of Louis XVI. made rare flowers of them. May I tell an Eastern fable, please, my lord?"

"Tell it, father; but beware! I know you; you sugar-coat your bitterest pills with Eastern fables."

"There is no pill here," said the priest, smiling. "It is simply of a king who sought a bird that, sweetest of all singing-birds, should fill his courts with melody. His courtiers had tried in vain, and the king himself went upon the mission. He came upon a brook. Bathing in it was a bird with back so brown it could hardly be distinguished from the rocks. 'The best of subjects for a bribe!' the king

thought, and spoke, 'O bird! I seek the sweetest songster of the world to charm my weariness; find me the bird, and your reward shall be a crown of gold and a necklace of gold wrought by my most skillful workmen.' 'O king!' the bird replied, 'if a bird's song can please thee I will go; but spare thy crown and necklace, for which I could find no use.' The king was angry. He threw a stone at her and cried, 'Then get you gone, brown-backed conceitedness!' She sprang into the air. Her breast and under-body were of purest white. Her wings and tail were white and tipped with crimson. There was a knot of crimson on her breast. As the feathers of her neck were ruffled, a band of yellow appeared, richer than the work of the king's most cunning beaters, and on her head a coronet of yellow, white, and crimson. She sang him a song, too, as she floated away, that to his dying day left nothing more for him but discords. That is all of it, my lord; yet, after all, think of it," said the priest, rising. He was tall, athletic, and handsome, — a man made to stand rather than to sit, and one who always took occasion to rise when he would say "N. B." As he walked toward the door he added, "Tell me, the next time I see you, that I am right."

The prince was hardly left alone when, strolling out upon the lawn, toward the broad lake that was the pride of the castle, he mused with a sigh: "Already I could say to him, Good Father Charlovitz, you are altogether right. I must have a wife — *must have*, unless I turn traitor to Meerschaum. And again you are right. I have seen the lotos bud and blossom on the Nile, and on the Jordan and Meandre

picked the lily of the valley. Yes, and I have seen a brown-backed bird in the forests of Poland, with a heart that was purer and whiter than snow. What did I do with her? And that song, as she floated away from me, 'I thought, sire, that you were a nobleman, and that you loved a mother. Beware her wrath! for she was a woman too,' will doubtless render life a very discord to the end. No, no; I can never atone to her or me for that bitter blundering. It must burn and torture here. Yet I must have a wife. I cannot have my choice. I will take whatever bird may come, good singer or ill. I will open the cage-door, and say, '*Come, if you wish to come;*' or, better, I will say to Father Charlovitz, 'Find me a wife;' and though I strike on Scylla to escape Charybdis, the world shall see a princess over Castle Foam."

"My master!" said a soft voice behind him. A page knelt, trembling, on the grass. Not one of his servants but trembled to meet him since his return from Poland; yet he had never beaten one since his boyhood.

"What is it?" he asked, almost angrily.

"My master, I am sent to ask if your Highness wishes the coach or the saddle to-day."

"Neither." The boy touched the earth with his forehead and hurried away.

"Stay! I will settle this while I am courageous," said the prince, and called after the page. "Go to the Italian hall, and from the mosaic table bring me a Byzantine jewel-box." The boy disappeared, and the prince repeated, "I will settle this while I am brave, once and forever."

Ah! but "forever" is a longer time than he, or any of his kind, have ever measured.

He stood looking into the lake till the boy returned. Thinking, perhaps, of the nature that was mirrored there in a picture more perfect apparently than the original, or of the picture in his heart of the dryadic Kathi, or of his own past life when compared with that about him and before him, he murmured that old world-wide proverb, in its original Italian, "Distance lends enchantment to the view."

The jewel-box was a gem, one of the finest specimens of that style of Roman workmanship. On the cover, rough, irregular tiles, in wonderfully soft and beautiful harmony, represented the Thorn-Crowned Head, after the fresco of Guido in the Pauline Chapel at Santa Maria Maggiore. He pressed his finger on a flashing diamond that covered the spring. The lid flew open. The box was lined with silver.

"Little box," said he, "you are my rarest gem from Italy, but none too rich a mausoleum for the relic that binds me to the purest pearl that ever lay deep in a cavern, out of the way of the surging sea of treacherous humanity."

He tore the leaf with "In memoriam" out of his journal, and leaving, where it lay upon it, the linden leaf, put the two into the jewel-box, bound a smooth stone over the cover to make it sink, then, pressing a farewell kiss upon the tiny casket, he turned his head away, and threw it with all his strength over the lake.

He heard the splash in the water far away, as it sank to the bottom — into oblivion? and the sound echoed as a knell over the water, fell into the prince's

heart, there too to sink to the bottom, the very bottom — into oblivion?

He looked over the lake again. The ripples had nearly died away. With a sigh, he said, "So may memory of the one who picked that leaf fade out of my heart and die!"

There is, I think, a philosophy that a ripple on the sea, as a vibration in the air, must go on and on forever, never to fade out and die, till wandering into eternity, each shall join in a cloud of witnesses whispering of the tongue and hand that caused it, "Thou art the man!"

But let them go. What harm? They are nothing but sounds, nothing but ripples, after all.

Forthwith the prince dismissed the matter from his thoughts, and returned to the castle, where he found Major Wolzonn awaiting him. It was the first time they had met since the officer's hasty departure from Round Lake, and his mission to-day was very much what it had been when he had found the gates closed a month before. He was nervous, ill at ease, and wholly without connection in the thread of thought running through his conversation. In truth, he was trying in every possible way to find out what more the prince had seen than a hermit and a horse, and each failure to learn anything, simply because the prince had nothing whatever to tell, made him yet more at random in his thrusts.

In despair, he struck at last at the root of the whole matter, and because he received the very answer he had been looking for he was driven almost wild.

"And what have you been doing in the past month, my lord?" he asked, and the answer that troubled him was, "I have been trying to solve a mystery."

"I knew it, I knew it, and all is lost!" groaned the officer, hardly caring whether the groan died beneath his moustache or went further. But as he must say something, he repeated, "A mystery?"

"A remarkably simple one when once deduced," added the prince, making matters so much the worse.

"Oh, damnation!" said the officer to the inner man, with a terrible sinking at his heart; and aloud, "My lord, you speak a problem. I cannot understand."

"A problem? No. You flatter me. It was simply what I told you, a passing mystery, that some men would have solved for me in a twinkling. It has taken me the month."

"And who?" gasped the officer; and to the inner man he said again, "As sure as destiny, he means me! Aye, I am done for! By the gods, I am! How calmly he charges me, as though 'twere but the trick of a holiday!" The answer was not instantaneous, and he asked again, "Who, my lord, who could have solved it?" and strangely enough, when it came, the answer was precisely what he had prophesied, yet it acted like a death-blow.

The prince had started a little at the first ejaculation "Who?" just enough to scatter the ashes from his cigarette over his embroidered coat, and he was bachelor enough to stop then and there, forgetting everything else under heaven, till the last vestige of an ash-flake had been brushed away. It was while engaged at this that the second "Who?" drew from him, in an absent-minded way, "Why, you," and in a lower tone, not a word of which the officer heard, "or any other man of like good sense."

"Oh!" groaned the major. The prince looked up from his work. His lips were white, his nostrils distended, his mouth open, his eyes staring in a bewildered way nowhere in particular, his cigarette smoking all by itself upon the floor, his hands hanging helplessly over his knees. It was all so comical that, losing the serious side, the prince fell back on his divan convulsed with laughter, supposing it all an extraordinarily well-planned joke on his part as well as the officer's. Once slain to have discovered what he supposed he had discovered, twice slain to be told of it with such abundant merriment, the major lost the last atom of self-control, and springing to his feet, he exclaimed madly:

"Aye, so, my lord! I bow! I grant it! What then? Is not the knave enough without making the fool of me as well?"

The prince ceased laughing as suddenly as he began, and turned slowly on the divan till eye to eye he met the excited officer. They looked at each other for an instant, one scarcely less amazed than the other, when the prince spoke.

"By all immortal, Constantine Wolzonn, what is the matter?" And Constantine Wolzonn did not know. It suddenly became self-evident that there had been a blunder, and that he had committed it. He seized his forehead between his palms as though he would have it pulverized without delay, and sinking on to the divan, said in a hoarse whisper:

"My lord, I have not been well for a week. What were you saying? I hardly gave attention."

"I should think not," said the prince, shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head over the prostrate

form much as a fond father would say, "Poor boy! poor boy! His conscience is tottering under a heavy load!" though the major was nine years his senior in life — life measured by sunrises. Then he turned resolutely away, — it evidently required resolution, — and as he rang furiously for wine he said to himself, "I have known for years that something was wrong there, but I will still let it go. He is far from a hardened criminal. No, he will never be one. There is a good fellow hidden there, and something will happen some day to rid him of his burden, whatever it is."

The major roused to drink the wine that was offered, then, like one in a dream, he asked:

"What was it you said, my lord?"

"Why, this, in short," replied the prince, wholly ignoring the interruption, "that finding myself such a recluse, without even religion enough for a hermit, I set my wits to work to right matters, and decided to find a wife."

"Not a hard matter," returned the officer, sitting upright now, with a sigh that seemed to have no limit of depth.

"That depends. But at all events, I shall do my part. The wine acts like a charm. You are better already. Have another glass."

CHAPTER XII.

LEAVES VERSUS FLOWERS.

IT was not long after his first conversation on the prince's marriage necessities that Heinrich Charlovitz took occasion to introduce the subject again.

"You are right, father," the prince said almost instantly; "and what is more, I want you to look about for a wife. You know, by repute at least, thousands of ladies whom I might perhaps marry, whom I know only by their dresses and jewels."

"Your Highness does me an honor inconceivable," replied the priest. "I will at least tell all I know or can learn of any you may name."

"No; name them yourself, father. I want, of course, a handsome face and a well body, but, most of all, purity and honesty. I care not a straw for wealth or title, so, of course, that she is nobly born. I've a heart, I suppose, but I doubt if it can love. I marry because I must. I will treat my wife as an honorable husband should. Such are my conditions. Can you fill them?"

"They are both very light and very heavy," replied the priest. "Let me ask the prince this favor: to give a banquet, such as I am told has not been at Meerschaum since your noble father became so justly disaffected, through Paul the First, with all the Rus-

sians. I will select, perhaps one, perhaps many; will tell the prince all I can learn of them, and he shall see them, and judge for himself."

"Do so, good Charlovitz. The ball shall be given at once."

Thus it came about that the notices of the ball were sent, and the day at last arrived. It was the very last of harvest time, and the Countess von Kramareff's daughter reclined upon a luxurious toilet lounge, drawn into a massive gray-stone octagon window, while her nurse Elise and a maid arranged a heavy coil of pearls, gathered in the Persian gulf by red-skinned divers, through the thick folds of sunlight hair, till the effect was that of sunbeams and moonbeams tangled about the lovely face.

"Elise," said the lady softly, "have you counted those wonderful cards to-day?"

"Yes, m'lady."

"I thought so. Now tell me, what do they say of the place where I am going?"

Elise made no answer.

"Are they bad?"

"No, m'lady."

"They are good, then."

"No, m'lady."

"That's very funny, seems to me, for such cards as those of yours. But tell me yourself, then, what you think of him who invites us."

The old nurse was silent.

"Don't try to escape me in that way. Elise, do you like him?"

"Yes, m'lady."

"Better than Major Wolzonn?"

"No, m'lady; nor near so well."

"You are not a respecter of persons, nurse. I verily believe you think as much of yonder serfs as of the Tzar. Now you may go. And, by the way, Elise, I expect a caller this afternoon. Mother is not well, and unless she rests we cannot go to Meerschaum; therefore, do nôt disturb her. It is only a matter of business, and I can see him alone."

Elise turned back after the maid had left, to add, "There's no good in his coming here so much of late."

"Who's coming?" the lady asked, starting on the divan.

"Why, him that's coming this afternoon,—the priest Charlovitz."

"Elise!" exclaimed her mistress. "How many times have I told you that questions are for me to ask of you, and that my business is none of yours."

Elise made no answer. She was satisfied; she had said her say; and she always said that say, though it were through fire and water, and right in the teeth of her lady's command to be silent; and the worst of it was that nine times out of ten Elise was right.

The priest came, and the daughter saw him alone, apologizing for her mother that she must rest.

"I am glad," said Heinrich Charlovitz, "for I had hoped to see you alone to-day."

"Have you bad news?" she answered with a flush, then a dark shadow fell over her cheek.

The priest was watching her closely, and asking himself for the hundredth time, "Is it love, as she says, or am I a party to the vilest ambition?" as he answered, "I will tell you, and you shall judge for

yourself. Everything is ready. I have done all you could have asked, and the result, so far as mere marrying, is as sure as you could wish. He will dance with you and talk with you. If he sees nothing to *object* to, simply *object*, he will to-morrow or soon ask for you."

"Surely, my good father Charlovitz, that is the perfection of success." The lady clasped one of the priest's hands in hers and would have kissed it. Seeing the motion he drew it quickly away. "Not for that, lady. It is not the functions of a priest I am performing now. Nor is it, as you say, the perfection of success. My lady, I have warned you before; let me once again — *He does not love.*"

"Ah! good father, you place a thousand times too much importance there. I love him. Love will find its own. He will love me, I am sure of it."

"It is my earnest hope, and shall be my constant prayer, if you accept him, that Heaven shall bend his heart to love. He loves no other, I am sure of that, and from the Tzar to the rag-picker there is not a more honorable man in Russia."

"And had a woman not better have such an one without his love, than the passion of a debauchee?"

"True, lady, true. Yet if you love him you will look for love."

"Do not your good books say that love begets love?"

The priest smiled. "It may be, my lady."

"It shall, good father."

"Still I tremble. The prince is a strange fellow. He says he was not made to love. I sometimes think he knows."

"And so much the better for me, if so far as he has gone he does not know the meaning of the word."

The priest was silent. He had a very strong suspicion that the prince had loved. Indeed he had formed a very correct judgment as to what that love had been, though not a word had been spoken that gave him any authority, and he had meant it in positive truth, and would repeat a thousand times that the Prince von Meerschaum was honorable to the last drop of his blood; yet had he dared he would also have added, "Lady Kramareff, do not marry him. I verily believe he will not love." As it was, he said more than his judgment concurred in when he replied to her last remark, "My lady, I have said all I can upon one side and the other. I have acted as your servant, not your friend. Your eyes are open; act your best judgment, and rely upon me to be yours in any trouble, whatever and wherever it may be."

He took his leave and sought his home with a heavy heart, quite the opposite to that which beat high in the breast of the countess's daughter, as she found herself in the splendors of Castle Foam, — such splendors as she had never even dreamed of, — and saying to herself, "I shall dance with the Meerschaum at least to-night; but in all this beauty, is it possible that I may please him?" Her task was easier than she thought, for she had simply not to displease, to win.

"Heinrich Charlovitz was right," said the prince to himself as he led her among the dancers. "You have grace enough for a queen. You are fair as his idol Marie Antoinette the Beautiful." And he won-

dered if, in time, such an image might not obliterate the simple little figure of the forest-girl.

My lady's happiness was for the moment complete. But there came other dances, when she leaned on other arms, and listened, or was supposed to be listening, to other voices; though through the mysterious mazes she was jealously watching the object of her thoughts, as he bent over others, speaking as tenderly as to her, and making her heart sink with fear for the future. A little later Count Olendorff offered her his arm. She dared not refuse the grouty old bachelor; yet in the midst of the life and death struggle between hope and fear raging within her, how could she dance? She was only a girl, she was not yet a woman trained in that mysterious and marvelous fortitude to endure everything with a smile, suffer everything with cheerfulness.

The old count was wiping his bald forehead.

"Are you not too warm to dance?" she asked.

"Conundrum, hey? I give it up. Ha, ha! But really, don't know but I am. Come and walk in the conservatory."

Obeying this command with pleasure, they were soon strolling leisurely through an immense flower-garden, where but few of the guests had yet penetrated.

"What magnificent flowers the Prince von Meerschaum enjoys!" remarked the lady, finding it impossible to keep her thoughts from that one point.

"Enjoys? Well, I suppose so, — one may say enjoys. But not a half hour ago I heard him say he did not know his callas were in bloom, — he had

promised to paint one for some one; and look, they are fading."

"He paints very finely," said the lady.

"Yes, I suppose so. Pity he was not left poor, and he might have done something; but now he'll fizzle in the pot. That is Count Olendorff's opinion."

My lady wondered for a moment what he meant by being left poor, as though the prince were not born to an estate unequaled in Russia; but many said that trouble had turned the old man's head, and, quite inclined to believe it, she dropped the subject, and answered:

"My lord, the prince is very far from extinguishing, even as an artist. Have you examined his pictures?"

How easy it is to champion or deprecate, when prejudice lends a hand!

"I suppose so," replied the count; "and I suppose, too, that you are running into the track that so many young women have followed for the last ten years, — going mad over the Prince Reppoun. But there's no earthly use in it, lady. Look at me: I'm rugged, hearty, and unscathed as Troilus, though all the women in the land did once run mad for me. And he's just like me. I've known him from a boy. He's cold and unfeeling as this stuffed bird." He laid his hand on the back of a flamingo standing on the edge of a fountain.

My lady stroked the feathers of the bird. They were neither hard nor cold. Unfeeling they might be; but she had hardly heard the bitter charges, being engaged in probing a mystery across the fountain, where two gentlemen stood with their backs toward her, engaged in earnest conversation. The

uniform of one left no doubt that he was Major Wolzonn; but who was the other? Something so strangely familiar, so unaccountably intimate in every motion, and a faint chill crept through her veins. The count saw them, too. First he was silent, pulling at his watch-guard till he broke the chain; then suddenly catching the lady's arm as though she were a spaniel, he said roughly:

"Let us walk the other way."

Again she obeyed; but rather enjoying the embarrassment, for retaliation is above all things sweet, she walked very slowly, stopped to pick a flower, while the count fairly danced in his nervous haste; then, with her sweetest smile, turning about and standing still, she asked:

"Who are those gentlemen across the fountain, my Lord Count Olendorff?"

"Come, come!" he said sharply. "They are none that you know or ought to know. Walk, or they will see us, and may follow."

"But who are they, my lord? They do not look like monsters," she said, turning slowly to follow, and eying him in a way that might have suggested a mental comparison had the count been sensitive.

"Damn it, they are monsters! — villains! One is Major Wolzonn, stationed at the citadel, who killed the Count von Kramareff, now about a score of years ago; and the other 's a Dane — Von Bremen he calls himself hereabout. He did a lot of dirty work for the traitors against Paul the First. There is no need to walk so slow. Come faster; they will follow us."

In his excitement Count Olendorff realized no more what he was saying than who it was to whom he

talked. What though the lady's cheeks and lips were white as marble? what though she staggered and caught his arm to keep from falling? what though the impatient jerk he gave it brought back to life a heart that was standing still, while all was dark about the countess's daughter? Count Olendorff knew nothing, cared nothing, for all of that.

Coming thus to consciousness, she asked faintly, "Did you say, sir, that it was Major Constantine Wolzonn who killed the Count von Kramareff?"

"I said so — yes. It was in one of their secret rendezvous; and it was good enough for the dastardly traitor to die in just that fashion."

No one blamed Count Olendorff for the rough way he had of talking of those Russians who had plotted against Paul the Reckless, for it was he who at that time had worn the honors of Lord Private Counselor and Royal Adjutant to the Tzar, and it was against him even more bitterly than the Tzar that the darts had been pointed. Then every one hated him; but now his world was upside down, and they pitied him. So he went on with his grumbling and cursing, and having begun upon Count von Kramareff, stuck closely to his text till Lady Kramareff, startled from the horrible reverie into which she had been thrown, turned abruptly upon him, eying him with a fierce glare, and saying, with all the dignity of that house she was honoring:

"Sir, I am the daughter of that Count von Kramareff."

"The devil you are!" said the count, looking down at her.

Then there might have been a scene, in which the

count so far departed from his wonted way as to apologize for his rudeness; or another, in which he clung to his wonted way, and told her he could not help it if she were; and then, when she rushed away from him and fainted, and revived, people would have said to comfort her, "You must not mind it, dear; it is only his way, that is all." For "people" in the abstract seem to think that "his way" and "my way" are all-healing balms for every wound that can be inflicted.

But both the scenes were interrupted, for at this opportune moment a small, handsome man, Albrecht von Bremen in fact, stepped between the two, with, "Oh—er—yes, my dear Lady von Kramareff, and my—er—my old friend Olendorff. Beg pardon, beg pardon, Major Wolzonn, Count Olendorff;" and placing the lady's hand upon his arm, he turned away, asking, "And—er—how have you been since we parted so unhappily?"

Altogether too thoroughly overcome for either resistance or reply, the countess's daughter silently followed him.

"A little abrupt, yes," he replied for her, glancing from the corners of his drooping eyes; "but you see I —er—well, I wanted a private word with you, and you are—er—yes, my lady, you are very cruel to me, and I knew you would not give it for asking. You—er—you know the proverb that a wise man changes his mind sometimes, only a fool never; and I—er—well, lady, to be brief, as I must, I *hoped* you had changed yours."

"Never!" said the lady, withdrawing her hand with difficulty from his arm.

"Never?" His lips went up under his moustache.

"Never! not were I to be branded the veriest fool; and I pray you so consider it."

"H'm. But you must, lady. You are my life, my love, my all. Love too much refuted turns to hate; and hate is dangerous when the hater knows so many of the hated's secrets as I know of yours. Hunger knows no laws, lady, and my love for you is hunger, keen and ravenous."

The countess's daughter leaned against a flower-stand for support. She trembled as she felt the subtle power of that strange, magnetic influence which he was wielding, and winding about her. It was not that she feared him, and she most heartily hated him; yet at that moment, had he ordered her to follow him to the altar, she would have done it; though she followed him as to hell, she would have followed still. She knew it!

"Monsieur von Bremen," she gasped, in a sort of despairing cry, "I bid you GO! Leave me! leave me, I command you!"

Alack for the longing Dane! He did not see as clearly as was his wont. He took the cry as a signal for desperate strife instead of a drowning man's grasp for a straw, and crowning Discretion at the expense of Valor,—he always did,—he said, with a very low bow, "Ah! well, my lady,—so, so. What must be must be, though, and something tells me you must be my wife."

Thereupon he left her, and she stood for some minutes, almost unconsciously, by the flower-stand, seeing nothing, yet gazing earnestly into the pure depths of a white lily, when suddenly a deep voice close beside

her roused her with the words, "'Handsome as Apollo, as Apollyon treacherous.'"

"Prince von Meerschaum!" she exclaimed, while the color mounted to her cheeks again, and she wondered whether she were more angry or happy to see him there.

"That is a pretty flower," he added, touching an exquisite exotic hanging from her brooch, without giving her a moment to reply; "I have tried in vain to find the plant."

"We brought a slip from Italy several years ago, but the blossom has no fragrance in our conservatory."

She broke the stem and gave it to him. He bowed, smiled, and was gone, wondering, as he went, why such a beauty might not cover up entirely any attraction to be found in a plain, poor little linden leaf.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISSING LINK.

"WHAT! Zounds! my boy, how wet you are! Where have you been?"

"In the court-door, master."

"Hey?" snarled the grouty master. "And is the air so full of snow that you must be covered from head to foot for opening the door?"

This was a downright lie. The boy was not covered from head to foot, but had brushed himself with commendable neatness, only forgetting his shoulders, as all boys will.

"Please, master, a gentleman kept me waiting there so long until he found his card —"

"His what? A card? Give it me quickly! Why did you not wait till morning, and then send me to your room for it?"

"Because the gentleman is waiting, master, to know if you are in."

"Well, I'm not in, do you hear?" he almost shouted, standing with his back upon a broad window, and holding the card at arm's length to accommodate his veteran eyes. "Go down and tell him so, and then brush off your coat."

The boy turned to obey, but was met in turning by the very man himself, who gave him a pat on the

shoulder, and said in a soft, gentle voice, "The last you may do, and welcome if you need it; but the first — that would be a lie, a wicked lie, my boy. Never tell lies, never tell lies; but tell the truth and shame the devil, even if he be your master."

Much bewildered, the boy went out, while, calm as a summer sea, the stranger bowed very low to the old man, and said, "If you are not in, my lord, you should not—er—not roar so loud. Your trumpet belies your words. It is a powerful trumpet, yes."

"I suppose so," was all the old man vouchsafed.

Seating himself before the fire, and thrusting one foot toward the flame, the new-comer inquired, "And why were you not in, my lord?"

The old man made an evident effort, but answered cheerily enough at last. "The fact is, I'm old and worn out, and could not bring myself to wish to see any one."

"H'm," observed the other, wagging his foot before the fire.

"I say!" exclaimed the old man, pulling vigorously upon a bell-rope, as if to prove that he had lied and was not old and worn out, "you'll have some wine?"

Somewhat aroused by the anticipation, the other pushed his chair back to the table and replied, "I think I will," and in a moment asked, "Is there no news, my lord?"

"News? No. In fact, I'm clean disgusted with the whole affair."

"*Disgusted!* That's a long word for you. You must be feeling better than you did, and I might as well go back with mine."

"What is it, hey? You have some news?"

"Oh—er—yes. I thought you were—er—dis—er—dis—dis—"

"Disgusted?"

"'Gusted, yes, 'gusted; disgusted; yes, I thought you were disgusted."

"And who would not be, as things have gone? Come, if you've news, let's have it."

Leaning over the table, he whispered something in the old man's ear that caused him to start back so suddenly that the decanters rattled on the table.

After a moment's pause he emptied his glass, took his hat, and without a word of farewell started for the door. This course was cut short by the old man, who grasped him fiercely by the arm.

"H'm, well, my lord, what is it?" he asked.

"This, sir!" The old man jerked himself from his chair by the visitor's coat-sleeve, who looked deprecatingly at the spot where he had let go. "I have a piece of news after all, and it quite overthrows the benefit of yours."

The old man was silent, till, lowering from under his eyebrows, the other observed, "Waiting for you to proceed, my lord,—waiting for you to proceed."

"Hey? Well, then, I will. We are neither of us likely to reap much from the estates of Meerschaum!"

"Tush, tush! Take a trumpet, and roar it from the window."

"What do you say? No, I will not whisper it. We are *vanquished*, man. That is Count Olendorff's opinion."

"I should like to know by whom?" said the visitor carelessly.

"Know then! The daughter of the Countess von Kramareff is even now betrothed to the Prince Reppoun."

The visitor hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, while his eyes half closed themselves. A moment of silence elapsed. Then calmly enough he replied, "How can that matter, if we keep the girl away?"

"I suppose so; at least, that you can carry your point, whether he be husband of a Kramareff or a bachelor; but, don't you see, what to me is that gold and that title without a wife? Ever since the ball at Meerschaum I've had the countess's daughter laid away till such a time as I might offer her just that place to marry me. She did not promise me at the ball, but I was coming at it when you came and took her off; and I thought, to make sure of it, I'd just go round and talk with the old countess yesterday; and then she told me;" and the old man, sobbing like a child, dropped into his arm-chair, while two great tears followed the hard wrinkles on his face down into his moustache. Evidently he could not endure in his second childhood what he had "passed through unscathed" in his first. "Help me there, too, Albrecht," he sobbed, "and a half of the income from both estates shall be yours instead of a third of the one. Do you see, hey?"

The Dane did not say whether he saw or not. In fact, he was gone when the old tear-dewed eyes were opened.

Left alone, Count Olendorff ran his fingers through

the straggling strands of silver that still clung about the outskirts of his crown, scrupulously avoiding the summit, and paced the room like a young man of thirty, instead of the old man that he was, with one-and-seventy winters weighting his life with snow.

Pausing before the window, he flung open the sash and thrust his head out into the fierce, driving storm. With a sigh of relief he saw the sleigh pass from the court, bearing his late visitor; for notwithstanding the great value which he had plainly placed upon the services of Albrecht von Bremen, he hated and feared him.

"Why did that man ever come to me?" he asked the snowflakes. "Why did he tell me I was the next in kin to the Prince von Meerschaum, when I never knew that a drop of the same blood ran in our veins? Why did he prove to me the possibility of legally thrusting him out and taking the place myself? Why did he disturb the quiet of my old age with such a snarl and tangle, and drag me into mischief that would damn any soul to hell to carry through the point?"

Then he went back into the room, and still thinking of the mischief and the damning, said to soothe himself: "But what of that? My soul was blackened deep with crime many a year ago, unless the absolutions I receive before each Easter day have kept it white."

Here was consolation, and, drinking another glass of wine, he lay down on a low couch to smoke his pipe, and wonder how soon it would all come about as he and the Dane had planned.

He would not have lain and wondered so quietly had he known how thoroughly he had disturbed his potent servant by his bit of information, and that that individual was just then struggling in deeper drifts than the horses that drew his sleigh. In fact, Albrecht von Bremen was thoroughly upset. Not, as he had so calmly said, that the marriage of the prince would overthrow the plans he had been half his life in laying, but because beside those plans he had a still more interesting network laid to entangle the countess's daughter, and it maddened him to see her slipping from his fingers.

"I have sworn I would marry her, *and, by the gods, I will!*" he said, stamping his foot upon the floor of the sleigh. But how to do it, that was the question that upset him. His plans for her were very far from completed. There was no hope that he could carry them out in time. Possibly they would not have succeeded if he had. Of those for the prince he felt more sure, and they were nearer perfect. They would easily do the work for both, and upon them he turned all his thoughts, wholly ignoring Count Olendorff's longing for a wife, though it was through Count Olendorff's position that he had gained every introduction in St. Petersburg's best society.

He was in more of a snarl and a tangle than the old count by far. "Oh!" he groaned, "if I could but find that missing link that would prove Reppoun a bastard. What a fire such a spark would light in this Russian capital! Just one!—one link in a long chain of evidence! The prince his father, an actress his mother! Adopted in infancy by the Princess von

Meerschaum to satisfy her lord, for whom, in ten years of marriage, she had not borne a child, and by her sworn to as her own. Only his mother to find! Only an actress! Oh, where can I go? What can I do to find the missing link?"

CASTLE FOAM.

PART II.

"'Would'st thou,' so the helmsman answered,
'Learn the secret of the sea?
Only those who brave its dangers
Comprehend its mystery.'"

"For gentleness, and love, and trust,
Prevail o'er angry wave and gust;
And in the *wreck* of *noble lives*
Something immortal still survives."

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

TIME has been growing old. Ten years have worn away — some longer, some shorter than the average length of years; merry and sad ones, coming and going from eternity to eternity, laden with the trials, cares, and pleasures of a wide, wide world. There have been changes in the ten years, as in every span forming a link in a lifetime; but not so many changes as in some shorter spans. All are alive whom we met before. All are ten years older; some for better, some for worse. Constantine Wolzonn, for instance, is certainly sadder, and thinks himself wiser; but whether he is benefited thereby he himself does not know, much less his neighbor. The Emperor Alexander died in the south of Russia, with those memorable words upon his lips, "How beautiful is the day!" His next brother, Constantine, being wholly unequal to hold the reins of government, gave them into the hands of the third brother, Nicholas, who took them under a threatening sky, with the still more memorable words, "I shall soon be an emperor or a corpse. If I am emperor only for an hour I will show the world that I am worthy of the name." That was in the midwinter of 1825.

The days had grown darker and darker about Major

Wolzonn. He was submerged in despair consequent upon the actual worthlessness and wickedness of his life. It chanced that he was in the presence of Nicholas, and heard these words. They inspired him with a strange, fanatic zeal. Suddenly he sprang into that position where man becomes most useful in the world. A man to whom self was unknown, life a forgotten thing; energy, courage, indomitable will, as slaves of duty the life-blood and the brain. He laid his sword at the feet of Nicholas. He touched his forehead three times to the ground, and said, "Master, accept my life." Nicholas knew well the value of such a sacrifice. He accepted the offering and found a man madly devoted through the struggles that ensued, possibly even longing for some cold, shining blade that should honorably sever the silver cord that had become so tarnished. Finally established securely as Tzar of all the Russias, the emperor did not forget the man who had been valiant captain of his bodyguard, and now, in 1832, Constantine Wolzonn was a general. But with quiet and rest, the new spirit of self-abnegation had worn away, and the old restlessness came back: the old torments of the murderer, the old tortures of the lover.

The countess's daughter had honored the house of Kramareff to the full satisfaction of her mother, and had been for ten years the Princess von Meerschaum, for Albrecht von Bremen, though still in the field, an ardent laborer in behalf of his tottering patron Count Olendorff, was yet baffled in his search for that "missing link." Half a century and two years more had slipped away from him, and still the great aim of his noble life was to depose the Prince Reppoun and

marry the princess, whom he had not seen, from principle and prudence, since she had driven him from her in the conservatory at Meerschaum.

The affairs at Castle Foam we must consider at greater length. Suffice it just now that for nine years a little prince has been growing tall and strong and large upon the castle lawn. A little "Victor" of course, and as like his father in body, head, and heart as a little drop of water is like a larger one.

CHAPTER II.

AN ECHO FROM DEEP IN A MIRE.

THE summer was wearing out. It was ten years and six months, in fact, from the conversation of Count Olendorff and Albrecht von Bremen, when the Prince Reppoun, reclining in a summer-house at Meerschaum, noted a little shadow in the door, and heard a little voice say, "Papa!"

"Well, Vick, what is it?" he asked, without looking from his book.

"I'm going to learn to skate when winter comes again; Leo says he'll teach me." He paused there for an evident lack of attention on the part of his father. "And too, papa—"

"And what too, my boy?" still without leaving the page.

"The lake would be just the place to learn on, only it's so shallow that in winter the mud comes through, you know, — wouldn't it, papa?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, papa, Gabriel's father says he could get the water out and dig it as deep as we wanted, and then let the water all in again. Wouldn't that be all right?"

He kicked the toes of his little boots into the dirt behind him, wheeled back and forth upon one heel,

and tried to pull the buttons from his coat, while he waited for an answer.

"Do you say it, papa?" he asked impatiently. Who had a better right to be impatient?

"Yes, yes, you scamp. Don't bother me, and you may do as you please forever."

"Hi, hi! I don't believe I'd better bother him much, if that's the way," Victor said, as he ran away with his playfellow Gabriel.

"No indeed," said Gabriel.

And three days afterward, as the prince sat smoking in the Oriental vestibule, Victor entered, followed close by Gabriel, without even waiting for a boy's ceremony.

"It's almost done, papa," he announced, panting for breath.

"And what is it you are doing that is almost done?" asked his father, patting his ruddy cheek.

"Why, papa, didn't you mean they should? You said it, any way."

"Said what, my boy?"

"Why, dig the park-lake deeper, so I can learn to skate, you know."

An incident of long ago flashed over the father's mind, causing him to spring rather more hastily than he was wont from his reclining position. His boy shrank back toward Gabriel. The worst result, however, was a pat on the cheek, and the smiling announcement that his father must go and look into the matter.

The boy's smiles came again instantly, as though his little face were only a mirror of his father's, and holding something in his muddy little hand, he said:

"And see, papa, see what we found buried deep in the mire."

Here Victor's prattle was finally checked. His father seized the dirty foundling, exclaiming, "That is a box of mine, Victor, that I lost many years ago. Thank you for finding it. Now run away." And without waiting to see him off, he left the room.

"I think that is pretty funny, don't you, Gabriel?" pondered Victor, and, as ever, Gabriel answered:

"Yes indeed! But I wish you'd asked him how it came open, before he went away."

"But he went so quick," said Victor.

"Yes indeed!" said Gabriel.

The prince had gone directly to his private library. It was a room furnished by himself for his own purposes. Rows of shelves, crowned with heavy wood-carving, covered with glass screens, supported one of the largest libraries in Russia. This, however, must not assume undue proportions, for it must be remembered that only twenty-nine years before there was not a bookstore in the entire empire, and not a book, made or written outside of Russia, allowed to be owned under the scepter of Paul. Copies, from Florence, of the colossal heads of Socrates and Plato stood one on either side the door. Under a high dome in the center of the room stood one of Karnak's smallest obelisks, a miniature of the sphinx of Ghizeh and temple of Anaraches on either side. One deep, heavily curtained window, beside the dome, lighted the apartment. Beside the pillars of the window stood the Hindoo god of wisdom, Vishnu, six feet high, in bronze, and the Greek Minerva in marble.

Bolting the door, the prince threw himself upon

the soft cushions that circled the window-seat behind the curtains, and there gave freedom to a deep, long smothered sigh that had lain for ten weary years imprisoned by the word of his strong will. It was a sigh of no one and definable meaning, but it radically changed in its breathing the already turbid current of his life. It was an echo from deep in the mire, — an echo of that splash! as the box had struck the water, when it sank, but not to oblivion, not beyond resurrection. This sudden summons had raised the almost dead, and taking the prince at a moment when his heart was not steeled against temptation, had won a victory that Kathi Chichkini herself might have lost.

As he sat in that window-seat, holding the precious box, his summer in Poland swept like Canaan before him, — "a fair and happy land." He only remembered he had loved, — dearly, madly loved, — "not wisely, but too well;" and distance lent enchantment to the view. He remembered how for ten years he had fought with himself to love another, and failed. Why? Was it because he loved Kathi Chichkini? He thought so. But Constantine Wolzonn was either more of a philosopher, or knew him better than the prince knew himself; for when he first heard of the betrothal he had hurried in honest agony to his cousin, and said to her: "My lady, he is too faultless, he is too perfect, to abide by imperfection, be it never so hidden. I know him better than you, and warn you he seeks in life an ideal of his own construction. He will never be satisfied with anything a hair's breadth short of that perfection. Pygmalion was not so fastidious; for could he carve for himself intrinsic loveliness, and a god answer his prayer for incarna-

tion, till the flesh was the wax of Hymettus and the blood immortal ichor, even then he would be dissatisfied, because, forsooth, the fever and the weakness of living were there. You know that there is no one perfect here, and if he should find himself mistaken in this step, your river of life would be a Bhar Sheitan to you."

The countess's daughter was at that moment blind to everything but the glory and the determination that she would "force him to love her," and gave the most natural yet most unexpected of all replies when she said, "Are you not prejudiced a little in your own behalf?"

Pride had kept her cousin silent since that day, though in truth, and he knew it, he had hit very near the mark. The prince had seen in Kathi Chichkini an approach to perfection that he had not found in the world before, perhaps because he had not looked for it, and it suddenly stirred to the depth of his soul all his adoration for the beautiful. One could not say that he did not love her, or that he would not have loved her forever and ever had she become his wife, but I do believe that what he loved was *not* Kathi Chichkini, — a blunder that brings more sorrow into this world of love, or hate, than all the others piled upon each other.

What of it? It was as real to him as love is ever real, and this reaction after a long struggle found him many times more passionate than before. Insanely passionate! for man may worship beauty till so far beyond himself that he is no more himself than the pilgrim to Chawvereipak who falls before the wheels of the car of Juggernaut.

With indescribable reverence he laid the little box before him, bitterly crying, "Why hast thou come to the light again, relic of my Herculaneum?"

Exposure had ruined the side of the box, but the stone bound over the top had protected the cover. The Divine Head by Guido was as perfect as ever, and the magnificent diamond, brighter for its long burial, flashed angrily, as Solomon's genii upon the fisherman who released him.

"I wonder if the water is inside?" he muttered, and pressed his finger on the jewel, but drew it back with a shudder, and, shaking his head solemnly, placed it in the window-seat, laying beside it a medallion set in precious stones. No one saw the prince that day or night, and the valet who brought his dinner and tea to the door took both down again untasted.

When he appeared for his morning drive he looked worn and weary. Servants shrank away from him, wistful of that peculiar frown that the oldest among them remembered in his father as an omen of no good, and, shaking their heads, asked the old butler if he thought there was aught amiss between the lord and his lady. And the wise steward, with his thumb beside his nose, redder somewhat for ten years of smelling of his master's wine, answered, as many times in years gone by, "Wait! that is no affair of yours."

Even Victor and Gabriel cast significant glances at each other, and stole away without asking, as they had planned together, how it was the little box came open, and what it really was that had lain buried in the lake so long.

"I don't believe he's very glad to find it, after all,"

said Victor. "He's awfully mad about something. I hope it's not about us and the lake — don't you, Gabriel?"

And, as ever, "Yes, indeed!" said Gabriel.

Twilight, once again winding its somber shroud around the gray-white walls of Castle Foam, found its master bending before a victorious idol. Pale and conquered, he was kneeling there, clasping in his hands a small golden crucifix, pressing it to his forehead and his lips, beseeching forgiveness for words yet unspoken, for deeds yet undone.

He shuddered, but struggled no longer, for he felt himself borne on by a power beyond the resistance of his will. As a leaf glides helplessly down a swift-flowing stream, so recklessly he gave himself up to the flood that had overtaken him, and floated down.

The cold, clear, heartless moonlight fell mockingly into the window-seat, as, putting down the crucifix, slowly he laid a trembling hand on the sacred little box.

"It is *cold — cold!*" he whispered, as he drew it from its rest. "If it has mouldered and gone, this shall be the end of it; I leave with its ashes all it represents. But if it be perfect, I am resolved. May God judge me!"

His lips were dry. His tongue was parched as he touched the spring. The hinges were rusty and did not move. Slowly he forced it, till, roused from its lethargy, the spring laid the cover open in his hand. He sprang back, unable to look at the long-hidden treasure, sealing his vow thereby. Then, again bending forward into the moonlight, he dared the venture. With fingers as weak as a child's, he drew

it from its long resting-place, as dry as though it had lain those years on the sand shrine at Mecca. Folded in the paper lay two halves — skeleton halves — of what once had been a linden leaf. He raised them to his lips to kiss them, but as they felt his breath they floated from the paper, light as air. Was it an omen? He sprang to catch them. One half fell upon the casement, the other slipped from his fingers and with a whirl swept through the window, freed from the narrow confines of its tomb, to dance a wild jubilee on the autumn wind.

The part which remained the prince laid tenderly between two ivory covers, beside the medallion and the crucifix. Softly the moonlight left the window, and only the silvern ripple of the leaves reflected its light from the western horizon. Then one by one even the brightest stars sank into the gray before the dawning.

The sun was shining full and warm when the prince sprang suddenly to his feet and through the curtains, which fell together behind him.

"How came I to fall asleep in such a place? What in the world was I doing?" he asked himself, slowly walking the length of the room. "I dreamed — ah! I remember. I dreamed of — the little girl in Poland. Oh, Kathi! Kathi! will you never cease tormenting me? Shall my crime, like Sindbad's burden, always cling to me?"

Pressing his hand upon his forehead, he exclaimed again, "How real! and why did I sleep, and when? I am confused. Is it morning, noon, or night?" Slowly he approached the window and threw the damask folds aside.

On the silk-tufted window-seat rested a gold-embroidered cushion, on the cushion a golden crucifix, a sparkling medallion, and a white, ivory plate. The prince raised his hand almost in prayer as he gasped, "My God in heaven, IT IS REAL!"

Then he recalled his vow? and though the few remaining leaves hung drearily upon almost empty branches, and Winter, one foot on the threshold, was nodding his frosty head to the people of the land, it only hastened his movements, and ordering his calèche to be fully prepared, he made immediate arrangements for a trip to Poland. Though the sky was heavy and dull, that somber leaden hue that comes creeping up from the north lands when the stork and the heron fly southward, though the wind wailed through the naked branches, and straggling leaves that longer than their fellows had clung to the old trunk came rattling down, chanting by the way a weird funeral march to the summer-time that they were burying, he had vowed he would go to Arantha, come what might of it; and to Arantha he went.

He had time in abundance for the laying of plans through the long hours, broken only by the rattle of the wheels and the rumble of the horses' hoofs; but plans he had none to lay. He was simply going to Arantha — going to see the miller's daughter; doubtless to ask to be forgiven; but to nothing more than that had he given a thought. This was not a pleasure trip,—it was a penance. The prince was not fastidious for luxury at any time, least of all when on a hasty pilgrimage. He left his servants at the first post-station, with directions to wait there and be momentarily on the watch for him. He took four post-horses in

the place of his own, and a post-driver. They were changed at every station and driven hard. Night and day the calèche was dragged along at a rattling pace by the tough little horses, urged by well-feed drivers. It is surprising how short a long journey might be made in Russia where everything was ready, and money spurred the mare.

The roads became narrower, the trees thicker, the hills steeper, and the horses' feet, crushing through the drifts of leaves as they galloped down the hills, sounded like the crackling and roaring of a fire in the forest.

But Victor Reppoun took no hint from this new face of nature. He could not realize that marring, tearing Time could deface the beauties of that nature that was still represented in his mind as "Hardly nineteen, I think, and a village girl at that."

It was night when they stopped at the station in Arantha, and the gouty old landlord of the inn and official of the station did not recognize his guest of eleven years before. He would not have recognized him had it been broad daylight.

As he sat in the same little window looking westward, Prince Victor could not but compare the night when he had watched before, and now, when clouds hung heavy and dark over the mill, with the strange similarity of difference in himself. Yet even then it would not occur to him that Kathi Chichkini could have changed.

The forests were unnatural as he entered them. The stream rippled no longer, but rushed, a muddy river, swollen with the fall rains. Suddenly he stopped. A crooked linden told him he stood where

he had once fallen into the water. He turned to the grotto. What a ruin! The outline of the huge log in the center was marked by a growth of coarse marsh-moss and lichens. The rankest, hardiest ferns had choked the colored grasses and killed the white-bells and the blue-bells. The trailing vines, unguided, lay upon the ground in tangled masses, or hung like weeping-willow limbs from the naked branches. A poisonous, offensive, malarial damp rose from the whole. Victor Reppoun's horse turned toward the lake. He did not stop him. No little boat lay on the water; no little footpath led from the lake either way. But the old gnarled trunk was there, as strong and ragged and gray as the day she had turned back again to its protection. "Has she gone too?" he asked the tree, fiercely, as though it had stolen her.

He drew rein at the mill-door. Nothing else was left him, and a hollow sound that echoed from the stroke of his whip-handle made him tremble. But an old man opened the door, —the same old man with the same keen eye,—and with almost a cry of joy the prince exclaimed in French, "Father, I am a traveler, may I buy my dinner here?"

The old man answered him in pure Russian, "Aye, aye, traveler, you are welcome to what my isba holds. Only take it without paying, traveler."

"You take me for a Russian," said the prince.

"Aye, traveler; and being a Russian myself, I thought I'd warn you to be well out of Poland by sunset to-morrow, for sure's the sun sets, the Tzar will leap in his throne to hear that Poland has revolted from his crown."

"Poland revolted!"

"Aye, my lord traveler, Poland revolted heart and soul."

"And you a Russian and not afraid to stay?"

"I'm more afraid to be in Russia. Listen a bit, and while you eat I'll tell you."

The same gaunt woman brought in a tray and smoking samovar. The isba was not so tasteful and neat as it had been. The old miller, sitting astride the farther corner of the table, one foot swinging in the air, began his story.

"Listen, traveler. I've never told this to a living soul, and for the men's names I'm sworn upon the images to keep them secret still; but they've broken faith with me, and what I may I tell you gladly, being it's you that treated the little girl so well."

The prince smiled, and said, "You have a keen eye, father."

"I was a soldier, a little officer under General Kramareff, in Suwarrow's camp, in 1798, under the flag of Paul. For what I did at the battle of Liman Suwarrow put his hand upon my head and said, 'Brave man!' We went into winter-quarters the first of 1799, and I asked my officers to let me go long enough to see my little wife for just a day, for we were only three days married when they tore me away from her. Oh, but they laughed at me! Then I dreamed that my little love lay sick, and, faith! I knew she had no money and could have no food. Oh, traveler, those were my boyish days, and my heart ached, for I loved her. One night I was on guard in mid-winter. Suwarrow came dashing through the camp, his horse without a saddle, he without a shirt or shoe. Making that I thought it an

enemy, I seized the horse's head and cried 'Halt!' I stopped him, though it almost cost my life. The great general smiled, and said, 'Well done! What shall I do for you?' So I asked him to let me go, and he laughed at me. 'A dame should send soldiers out, not call them back, or she's a devil, not a dame,' said he. Aye, traveler, an hour later, mounted on that very horse of his, I was going madly as the horse could go for Russia. I reached there before a soul could overtake me, and I found that little devil that had called me back. I found her dead, a frozen corpse, weeks old; and in that terrible winter not a soul left with strength to bury her. I swore for vengeance; then set the isba burning, and tried to perish in the flames. But the smoke stifled me, and my courage failed. A young boy, who had been playing soldier under General Kramareff, met me afterward not fifty versts southward from Petersburg. He was alone in a post-troika. He said, 'Man, I know you! You stole a horse, and deserted the Russian army. You shall be shot. But stay! If you will do something for me you shall not be betrayed.' Traveler, I was a wanderer, a licensed peddler to be sure, but homeless, friendless, and mad. Life was the only sweet thing that I knew, and that was bitter too. Still it was easy to tell him I would do anything he asked to save that life. 'Get in,' he said. I got in." The old miller's voice began to tremble, his eyes were brighter than ever, glazed with tears. "'Here is a little bundle,' he said, pointing to the seat in front of us. 'Be careful, it is valuable. You may open it when I am gone. Open it carefully. Here is a bag of gold. Use it to

care for that bundle. Go into Poland. Stop in some quiet place and live, and so long as you live and care for that bundle I will support you. Fear nothing, no harm can come of it; but for the love of your life and soul let no Russian nobleman know of it or see it! Swear this upon the cross.' I made the cross, and swore it. The gold and the promise of support were tempting."

The miller paused; his voice was husky. The tears no longer waited in his eyes.

"And the bundle?" asked the prince, an ominous trembling in his heart.

"The bundle, traveler, — *it was a baby girl!*"

"Not —"

"Aye, traveler, Kathi Chichkini."

"Then she was not your child?"

"My child! Lord, she was better stock ten thousand-fold than could have come from me! *She was an angel*, traveler, an angel born in God's own Paradise." The miller's face grew radiant. He sprang from the table and raised both hands devoutly.

"Born where?" thundered the prince.

The miller started. "Oh, I beg your pardon, traveler, I did not mean it. But she was lovely."

"Born where, did you say?"

"I said in Paradise; but though it's not supposed I know, one night when they thought I'd gone to town, they two as came down from Petersburg to see about her several times, I heard them saying, one to the other, that she was daughter of a Russian nobleman."

"And she is noble!" Victor Reppoun's head fell

heavily upon the table. The miller was crying like a child, and did not notice it.

"And what of her to-day?" the prince asked, with a shudder that shook the very depth of his being.

"Gone!" said the miller.

"Gone! and gone where?" he asked, looking up suddenly.

"Gone these ten years and more. Gone within a month of the time you saw her last."

"And where?" He sprang to his feet.

"Lord knows where, traveler. One of 'em came alone and took her, not the one that left her with me. Gone — married, I heard them tell, some years afterward."

"Gone, married!" groaned the prince, as he staggered toward the door. He said nothing further till he had mounted, then suddenly recollecting himself he turned, and threw a purse at the miller's feet, saying:

"Thanks for your story, father. If the knaves have not kept faith with you, come back to St. Petersburg, find them out, and bring them to terms, and if they have you arrested as a deserter, send word to the Prince von Meerschaum, and I will have you freed."

"The Prince von Meerschaum!" repeated the miller, as his guest rode away. "That's one of the greatest names of Russia. I've heard it many times, and now I've seen the great man in my own isba. Lord! I forgot to tell him how to get away if they took him for a Russian. He's headstrong by the look, and, by my faith! I reckon his son, if he have one, will be the Prince von Meerschaum before to-morrow night."

As for Victor Reppoun, he had no thought nor

wish to seek further. His heart and life seemed black as though wrapped in the Egyptian night, or buried in the gulf of gloom where in stellar glory the lurid Cassiopia had burned and flickered out. "My God, what an ending!" he groaned, and left the mill and the forest, and the bright star of his life, forever behind him.

CHAPTER III.

SHE WAS NOT PERFECT.

THE prince was returning as he went, day and night traveling and rapid stages, when General Wolzonn rode toward the Castle Schaum. Seeing Victor playing with Gabriel, he stopped his horse, and walked over the grass to meet him.

Victor, with a shout of joy, sprang upon the back of a huge St. Bernard, burying one hand in his neck, cutting him over the ears with a whip he held in the other.

"Bravo, Vick!" exclaimed the officer, as the boy dismounted at his feet. "Another year you'll break his back."

"Hi! hi!" laughed the boy. "Another year I'll have a horse. Papa's going to bring me one when he comes home."

"And is your papa away? I wanted to see him."

"Oh, yes; he's been away about a year."

"But I saw him less than a month ago, I think."

"Well, then, I've been waiting a year for the pony, any way."

The boy, already wearying of the catechism, turned gracefully heels over head on the grass, and started to run away.

"Victor, wait a minute," the officer called. "I have brought you something."

For this inducement the boy returned.

"What would you do with a horse if you had one?"

"Do with him? Why, just what you do with yours. I'd make him go."

"But you'd need a longer whip than that."

"I think I should. Is that what you've brought me?" he asked, with a boy's quick perception. The officer took his hand from behind his back, presenting the boy a handsome riding-whip, a broad band of gold about the hand-rest, on one side of which was the coat-of-arms of the house of Meerschaum (a bird sitting upon a solitary peak of rock, against which the ocean waves were breaking high in foam), and on the other side the boy's initials set in tiny diamonds.

"That's pretty," said the boy, and took his other whip in both hands to break it, but paused with his little knee in air, turned suddenly, and threw it toward his playfellow, crying, "Come and pick that up, and keep it, Gabriel, and I'll give you this too, if papa has a prettier one for me."

This being all the thanks General Wolzonn was likely to receive, as the boy had run away, (more, perhaps, than he had expected,) he returned to his horse. As he was mounting, Count Olendorff's coach rolled by, driven at a furious pace.

The old count had been paying his annual respects to the castle. It was the regular reception-day, and the princess sat in state in the long salon, with its three narrow and tall windows draped with Italian web, all upon one end of the room, and a copy of the Apollo Belvedere, guarded by one of Praxiteles' Mar-

ble Fawn, in opposite corners of the other end, where all was shadowy twilight on the brightest day. Long lines of oil-paintings connected the windows and the statues on either side. If she were happy there, she did not look it; if she were sad, she would not show it. A narrow spray of sunlight that had first wandered through the clouds, then through the trees, and after all through one of the three long, gloomy sentinels at the end of the salon, fell timidly in the strange, dim place, down upon a South-Indian tiger's skin. One of the yellow eyes flashed back the yellow light of the little wanderer. In the bright trail it left behind it from the window to the tiger's skin particles of dust were floating slowly and darting swiftly, utterly regardless of the great law of gravitation, when the count stepped into the midst of them.

He grasped the hand of the princess with bachelor cordiality, saying with the kiss:

"It gives me great pleasure, Lady Princess von Meerschaum, to greet you again, your cheek still bright with good health, and enjoying such unbounded luxury."

For years this had been a stereotyped genesis with Count Olendorff. But though so often repeated that his friends knew the form by heart, were always prepared for it, and never disappointed, though pain and poverty sat with them to receive, yet the count had a way of saying it every time as if it were something altogether new.

"With so many causes for happiness, how could I be otherwise?" asked the princess. Yet a shadow flitted across her face that seemed to give her words the lie.

"I suppose so," grunted the old man, as he settled himself into a chair and began rolling a gold-headed cane about his soft, wrinkled fingers with an evident relish that made one watching long for something just so round to roll with him.

He had hardly finished his round of stereotypes — after which time he always contented himself with answering questions and saying "I suppose so" — when the priest Charlovitz was announced.

The count rose hurriedly to go. He was much opposed to the sacred things of Russia, — to all sacred things, in truth, those of Russia only in particular. South German by birth, he had been left in early life to the teaching of powerful Jesuits. Long ago he had forgotten most of their pedantry, and only on rare occasions, when his old heart and long-subjected conscience called for something stronger than wine, more pungent than his pipe, — when sickness threatened, and pipe and wine failed altogether, and thoughts of the by-and-by made him tremble, — did he call for his old-fashioned book of prayer, and tell over dismally, one, two, three, all the beads on his ancient rosary. To bitterly hate the Greek priest and creed was the sum and substance of the old man's every-day religion.

"Humph! I'm too late," he growled, as the door opened.

The priest's salaam was very low, though he did not remove his square black cap, a license of office over everything else, of which the quiet priest never failed to avail himself. He said:

"It was not told me I should intrude upon any one, or I should not have come."

The count caught at the straw, and started to go, but could not carry out the plan.

The priest's message was short. He asked relief for one of the afflicted families of Schaumburg, who were unable to pay the rent that was due. The lady sent for her purse and presented it, when he bowed himself out with as much of Oriental suavity as ever graced the Bramin in the royal colonnades of Oude upon the Hoogly.

"Strange sort of a priest that," the count said as the door closed. "Yes, yes, very strange; is he not, your ladyship?"

"A little hard to understand, my lord, but one whom you may like better as you know him well. There is none of the sanctimonious goodness so insipid in many priests. I really adore Father Charlovitz. I believe I should go quite on a pilgrimage if he bade me."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so," said the count; and with a mental observation, "It will work like a charm, if it will work at all," he took his leave, directing that he be driven with all speed to Isak Bridge.

This accounted for the rapid motion of the coach as it passed General Wolzonn, who made his way at once to the castle.

"You are not a very frequent visitor of late," said the princess, extending both her hands.

"To my sorrow, I am not, my lady. I have been in Olen for a month, and am to be stationed there hereafter."

"We could scarcely see less of you were you stationed in Moscow."

The bright color had long ago faded from my lady's face, and the brisk enthusiasm from her voice, and the

quick, sharp glance from those dark, full eyes. Only the firmly outlined mouth and other expressions of a strong will remained. They were unpleasantly intensified.

It must not be inferred from this that the Princess von Meerschaum was a withered hag at thirty-three. She was a regal beauty when she chose to smile, and far beyond the average beauty of women of thirty-three at any time. But this solemn shadow that oftenest hung about her face was something new. Constantine Wolzonn had noted its frequent coming and tardy going with an increasing sadness in his heart. He had known that its cause could be nothing else than what he had predicted. But his lips, fast sealed by that stinging rebuke of eleven years before, dreaded to open. To-day he was more than ever impressed with the conviction that she suffered the torments he had warned her of, and accepted her invitation to drink coffee with her, mentally resolving that, come what might, he would speak again.

"I am her nearest living kin," said he. "She *must* speak, she must tell me. It is my duty and hers."

Once, twice, three times he tried to speak while toying with the thick, white foam that crusted the smoking coffee, and at last, conceiving of no way but his own blunt fashion, he came to the point at once.

"You are sad, my lady."

"Sad, cousin. I believe I was born sad;" she smiled faintly; "but too much laughing is not becoming in a lady. Quite the contrary in a soldier, and a bachelor at that. You of all men in the world should be happy, yet since I was a child, and you let me romp with you in the fields, I have not seen you laugh. Is it some-

thing that runs in the blood? At this moment you are not half thinking of what I am saying. Come now, be cousinly and confess: what is it keeps you always sad?"

She had taken the words out of his mouth, or, still more, she had told him precisely what he should have said. Such an unexpected question almost threw him off his guard; but not to be baffled at the very first, he selected the only part of her question that promised to aid him to his point, and replied, "You are partly right and partly wrong, my lady. They say the brain is double, and can think two things at once. It must be so, for I surely heard what you were saying, but as surely I was thinking of that time, long years ago, when we went, one night in Switzerland, up to that old witch's den. Do you remember?"

"I have stepped on dangerous ground," thought the princess. "Will he never cease vexing me about my miseries?" But there was not a tremor in her voice as she replied, "No, cousin, I hardly remember. What was there peculiar about it?"

"Is it possible?" asked the general in unfeigned surprise. How could he know that for months she had done little else than brood herself melancholy over that strange prophecy, curse the witch, wish she had never gone, wonder by what mysterious power she had known the future, and hope that her cousin Wolzonn had long ago forgotten it? He even began to explain, "There was nothing so very peculiar, except in the fortune she told you," when, looking up, a deep blush, that tinged the lady's face in spite of herself, told him the truth in an instant.

"Ah, yes! I do remember now," replied the prin-

cess, perhaps suspecting that he had fathomed the thoughts she was thinking. "It was a beautiful moonlight night, was it not? It seems a hundred years ago. And that infamous fortune, a wretched lie! It is quite time you had forgotten it."

"But I cannot, lady. It hangs about me like the cross in the path of the Wandering Jew, and sits a nightmare by my bed. Is it every word a lie, lady?"

"Sir! You do not mean —"

"Indeed I do not mean anything," interrupted the general, trembling lest the old rebuke were on the way again. "I was simply wondering if it were possible."

"And what is that to you if it be possible?"

"Much, very much, lady. For —"

She interrupted him, her lips quivering, the old fire in her eyes, and an angry flush spreading over her cheeks. "Do you pity me as a suffering mortal, pray?"

This was too much. It was a pointed lie, or the whole truth. Constantine Wolzonn did not think twice. He would sooner have fought the whole of St. Petersburg in a rebellion, but he fell upon his knees before her, exclaiming, "Yes, my lady, *I do* pity you."

The princess rose to her feet in a fury that well became her. It made her calm. She pointed her finger coldly at the kneeling officer, and slowly, scornfully said, "Do you think I should have done better to have married my father's murderer?"

Constantine Wolzonn staggered to his feet, white as the marble stand upon which his hand rested for support.

"Enough! enough!" he said. "I will say no more. I am ashamed of that dreadful crime, but not ashamed that I have spoken as I have to you. Forget me if you will, Lady Princess von Meerschaum, you shall have abundant opportunity; but if not, you must at least remember that there are circumstances in every life, unknown to any other life, that do mitigate the awful deeds that others see." They parted without a farewell, little thinking how and where they were destined to meet again.

When he was gone she sank into a chair and buried her head in her hands upon the marble table. "Oh my God!" she groaned, "why did I say that? Have I no will? Have I no courage? When Count Olendorff told me, ten years and more ago, I vowed it should never pass my lips. I was but a year old when it was done. I know nothing of those mitigating circumstances. Such deeds were common then, and, at its worst, it has been too long buried for me to think of vengeance. Oh, why should I have resurrected it now of all times, when it is impossible for me to think or wish for vengeance? He vexed me. But it was because he loved me. Is it a fault that I should punish that he has loved? Ye gods! I would it were as well a fault of the Prince Reppoun! Why will he never love me?"

This was a wild cry, faintly as it was uttered, a soul's cry, unveiling a horrible interior, a living tomb the existence of which her cousin had so correctly estimated. Grief and anger together became too strong for words. The head lay on the folded hands, only an irregular motion from side to side indicating the torturing thoughts within.

In one sense, she was correct. The prince had early discovered that his experiment in marriage was a failure, so far as he himself was concerned. But he had vowed that from simple justice to his wife, she should see in him no lack of the most scrupulous kindness, never dreaming but that would fill the measure of a woman's verb "to love;" and he lived to his vow, though in itself it made the duty almost irksome, and effectually closed any probability of the love he yet hoped would spring up. Politeness from a sense of duty is not kindness; even kindness from necessity is radically opposed to love. He had sternly held to principle through ten long years, though sometimes sorely tempted to make some sweeping sacrifice, give over the struggle, and be an exile, a hermit in some far-away corner, to expiate in silence the folly (what folly, he was not yet quite sure) of the memorable year 1821, leaving to Victor and his mother all that he could leave — everything, except himself. In justice to him be it said, that until the echo came back from deep in the mire, he had not for one instant thought of seeing Kathi Chichkini again, and that he went, not as a lover for clandestine cooing in the romance of the woods, but as a pilgrim to kneel at a dishonored altar and plead for absolution.

Indeed the thought of leaving Victor had many times acted to prevent him from thinking more deeply at least of an unlimited exile. He would groan in spirit, "It is all in vain that I wait and long. Oh Kathi, will you wreck my life as utterly as I would have wrecked yours? Merciful God, it would be a just punishment if I could bear it all alone!" But how could he bear it alone? How could he voluntarily leave

that boy in whom centered all the adoration and admiration of his life? Victor alone, thoroughly, unwittingly, cheered many a heavy hour, and opportunely many a time appeared, a bright, laughing reality, to disperse the almost overpowering gloom.

One such occasion was when the prince waited for the arrival of his calèche for the last trip to Poland. He was saying to himself "If this last venture shall bring no relief, then I will not come home again," when the child, followed close by Gabriel, came running up for a boy's farewell.

"And what will you bring me, papa?" asked he.

"And what do you want, Victor?"

"I want a pony."

In an instant thoughts of a hermitage vanished before the thoughts of that happy face that would greet him if he returned with a pony, and he promised, "Be a good boy, Victor, love mamma, and don't get angry, and when I come back I will bring you a pony."

With a merry shout Victor ran away to build air-castles with Gabriel; such palaces as happy childhood is forever building, fashioned after that city of palaces, with gates of one great pearl, and streets of virgin gold, and trees of life, and flowers that never fade, growing on crystal rivers; palaces where no death is planned, neither sorrow nor crying, in a land where night and winter never come. Beautiful mansions! would they might keep them. Beautiful homes! would they might live in them. Alas, that it should be so! that the hands of the little architects must grow rough and callous on the brick and sandstone of the world, till their Golden Tower, like that of Thebes, is but a precious treasured ruin of—

"The lost, the unforgotten,
Though the world be oft forgot;"

and the memory of the flowers comes back again only like the breath of the coffee groves as it is wafted in dreams about the Cingalese bondman pillowed on his iron scoop in the diamond mines of South America.

It had indeed seemed "a year" to the boy while he was waiting for the pony; to his mother a strangely long time too. Something had filled her soul with unaccountable misgivings; possibly it was only his absence at such a season, coming without warning or explanation. Sometimes, with a shudder, she had almost asked herself if it were possible that she had driven him away; and she watered this fear, as she had watered many a fear and disappointment in her life, with generous floods of tears. Tears are an excellent advocate of woman *versus* man; but there is a subtler charm in the cause of woman *for* man, that, like the sacred gem of India, is brighter in shadow than in sunlight and fairer in storm than in calm, — *a smile!* Try it, my lady, and you shall succeed.

She tried it afterward, and did succeed; but to her dying hour she did not know it was a victory.

She could not, if she would, have found a cause for complaint against her lord. He was precisely what he was upon their wedding-day, — what she had been warned that he would be, and what he had been every day of the ten years since, — the very essence and perfection of politeness, nothing more. In a sense her love for him had grown stronger, but it had become a sort of desperate love.

"*He shall love me!*" she declared, rising and walking toward the fountain. "The old Swiss fortune-teller has been too true so far; but I will conquer him. Have I not already bent every energy of woman to the end that he should love? And what have I been to him? Just as his horse and hound, — a dire necessity of life, to be petted and pampered just because I belonged to him. Should I be satisfied with this? Have I not fondled his feet in my love, that I might win just one caress? Is it because I am not perfect? Then Heaven help me, I will be perfect! That man shall bow to me, if it must be to do it that he shall stoop to shed a tear upon my corpse! But stay — I just remember what a sting there is in jealousy. It may be I have been too perfect, after all. I have at last succeeded in driving off even my last, my truest and best friend, Constantine Wolzonn. Why should I thus deprive myself of every one because deprived of him? It may be that is not the way to win the heart of man."

It may seem madness to assert that in a sense the Princess von Meerschaum was right, and yet she was. Far be it from any honorable soul to inculcate jealousy as a means to love; but in this particular case, Victor Reppoun, though he sought ideal perfection, could well have stopped short of the goal to have loved his wife, had he for one moment thought of her as she was, and realized the treasure he had won so easily. Even Kathi Chichkini had first to attract his attention before she gained his admiration, innocently as she did both; but the circumstances of his courtship and marriage had been such that in truth the Prince von Meerschaum had never known

his wife. He readily discovered that she was in face and figure fit mistress for Castle Foam; that she was gentle, kind, devoted to her duties, faithful to her vows. That was just what a wife should be. Beyond that he had thought of her only as a self-imposed barrier between himself and Kathi Chichkini, and a necessity to the house of Meerschaum. How could that encourage admiration? Something must surely attract his attention to other charms. She possessed them in abundance. If nothing else would do it, she was right in thinking of the sting there is in jealousy.

The air was growing damp with evening, and the sky a faint red and amber in the west, not so bright and warm as in the summer-time, but she still stood by the fountain in the glass-walled conservatory. The thought of General Wolzonn had driven others from her mind. She was gazing dreamily at the flashing fish seeking their nooks in the large basin, standing beside a pedestal from which, to please some ill-understood fancy, a stuffed flamingo had been removed, making room for a large figure of Venus supporting the open shell. Her arm rested on the foot of the marble goddess.

"What a life," she sighed, "devoid of trouble! Silenus was right: 'The best thing for a mortal is not to be born; the next, to die quickly.'"

What a philosophy for a princess of thirty-three! She realized the fact and added, "How strange that I should think so!—I who cried to God that the ideal of my happiness was to be the wife of Prince Reppoun! I who presented Father Charlovitz with five thousand rubles because he won for me that place! I who have been his wife these ten years, and in the

midst of boundless luxury cannot count one angry word! I who can drive my last friend from my door, calling him a murderer! Oh, I would be a child of Phorcys and Ceto, even in serpent locks, to have some power upon the man I love! I would welcome the beckoning of Mors, if I knew that he would shed one tear! Oh, Constantine Wolzonn, come back again! I did not mean to drive you off! I hate the horde of noblemen that kiss my hand because I am the wife of Prince Reppoun! I want a friend, such a friend as you have been! But no; you'll never come again! You are my father's murderer!"

She shuddered. A curl fell from its fastening and touched the water; her face was bent so close to it. She stood erect, and was pressing the water from the lock of her light hair, when she instinctively realized that a shadow deeper than the twilight fell over the fountain from toward the west behind her, and turning suddenly, exclaimed, "Good heavens! Monsieur von Bremen! How came you here? I did not look for such an apparition."

CHAPTER IV.

"WELL DONE!"

"WELL, well! I am here at last," said Count Olendorff, as his coach-wheels rested on Isak Bridge, and a head was thrust into the window.

"Yes—er—I see," answered the head, which, with the shoulders and arms and legs beneath it, constituted much of Albrecht von Bremen; "and—er—and particularly last too, if I know the time."

"A little behindhand? I suppose so. But you've not been waiting long, hey?"

"Ah, no, not long; an hour is not so long when compared with a lifetime, as it seemed this chilly afternoon."

The old man's eyes were so heavy with years that he did not note the drops of perspiration not yet dry upon the speaker's forehead.

"Well, well, I've been well occupied, to say the least. I've found a key that will unlock the door that you and I've been tugging at so long. Get in!"

The Dane seated himself.

"Let them drive me to —er—er— yes, yes, Castle Schaum."

The master passed the word mechanically, wondering what the Dane could be wishing for at the

Foam, when he added, extending his hand, "And now, my lord, for the —er— the key."

"The key! Ha, ha! That was a metaphor."

"A metaphor! Oh —er—yes, I see; a metaphor. Well, let us have the metaphor."

"I have come from the Princess von Meerschaum."

"Princess Reppoun?"

"The same."

"Proceed, my lord, proceed."

"And find already buried in the heart of the family one who can materially aid you in your plans. I am sure of it, little as I know what those plans may be."

"And it's well for them and me that you do not know," the Dane observed mentally; but aloud, "You say this marvel is buried. Can we resurrect him without a witch of Endor?"

"Silence, man! I tell you he is none other than their Greek priest Charlovitz. Sly fellow! The princess told me she'd go on a pilgrimage if he sent her."

"I wish he would," thought Albrecht von Bremen, but all he said was, "H'm — a pilgrimage."

"Do you see?" exclaimed the old man nervously.

"H'm —er— yes, I see!"

"And what do you think of it?"

"A Greek priest is surely a sly fellow, you are right there; and as for a woman on a pilgrimage, I hardly know what to think. Let them drive down to the village, however. The fellow may be of some service, *for the plans are ripe at last.*"

Count Olendorff started like one shot, but dared not ask a question. He had learned that to question

Albrecht von Bremen was like calling on an echo, until he chose to speak. Only one's own words came back to him.

They reached the lovely little village of Schaumburg. History proudly reported that it was Peter the Great himself who honored it with a visit of inspection when completed, and christened it "Schaumburg." It had increased in beauty every year, and the villagers were of the wealthiest, proudest, and happiest serfs of Russia. Such a serfdom they would have been foolish to exchange. Yet as a fact, the largest village revenues of Castle Foam came in return from Schaumburg.

It was the closing of a holiday. The merry voices of children sounded through the streets. The stream of deep, black water, cold and clear, that flowed swiftly through the village, dashed against the tiny abutments of its bridges as though it too were keeping holiday. Garlands of harvest-flowers hung in the windows. The children wore tiny sheaves upon their shoulders. It was the "Thanksgiving Day" of Russia. On the main park a cluster of children were winding the last coil of the day's pleasure in the old-time harvest-dance, where the boys stood on one side, the girls on the other, of the "charmed circle." A boy tossed his cap in the air, calling the name of a girl opposite. If she accepted the challenge, she caught the cap, waving her handkerchief, the corner of which he took in his hand, and holding it high in the air, the two wound round and round each other and round the circle. The couple who longest kept the ring without a smile or word, won

the badges, that were proudly worn until next Harvest Day.

How many little hearts have been bent, how many broken, how many romances begun, how many love-knots tied, how many bitter disappointments, and not a word spoken, in those "charmed circles" on harvest-days!

In the distance a priest was walking, with the inevitable swing of the priesthood, toward the church, from whose tower a silvery chime began to mingle with the clear, cool evening air its vesper melody, calling over Schaumburg that the sun must not go down upon the wrath of any one till it had been confessed in the Good Lord's sanctorum, and hallowed absolution given by the All Holy to the penitent.

> "Life of life from Jesus' hand,
> Light from out the Better Land."

It softened even Albrecht von Bremen's hard heart for an instant, but he had too important business on hand for it to remain soft long. Indeed, he had been rearranging his plans a little to admit the priest, and had found that after all he could be exceedingly useful if won over.

"Is that the priest—er—er— What did you say was the name of him?"

"Baumgarten! Baumgarten! No, no! Charlovitz, that's the name at least, and that is the man, I think. It is long enough for him."

"H'm — then perhaps I'll —er—er— "

"Walk!" exploded from the old man's lips, who was quite in the habit of helping the Dane, when he could, in his life-struggle after words.

"Exactly so, my lord, exactly so;" and suiting his action, the Dane dropped from the coach and walked, while the count was driven away.

At a rapid pace, it did not take long to stand upon the shadow of the square black cap, when the Dane assumed a more careless attitude.

The priest was reading half aloud. This for report, but his thoughts were wandering from the dry husks of letters. He started like one awaking from a dream when the Dane said, "This, I believe, is Father Charlovitz?"

"I am a priest, sir, and my name is Heinrich Charlovitz."

"Very good. Count von Bremen, at your service. May I speak with the priest without encroaching upon the tenor of his thoughts?"

"So your speech runs as his thoughts run — upon holy things," the priest answered, smiling.

"Upon sad things at least, good father, which are indeed next kin to holy things."

"Though hypocrites are of a sad countenance."

They had reached the church.

"Must you turn in, good father? Come this side a moment, where not so many are passing."

Under the spreading limbs of a skeleton tree, whose glorious midsummer garments lay in a brown drabble about their feet, the two talked together.

It was a hard task the Dane had undertaken, that of reversing the will of a strong man well satisfied with his present notions. He realized this thoroughly, for almost the only book he had ever studied, and he had spent his life in study, was the great book which God wrote, of many chapters, and every one of them a

book, — beating, throbbing, living, moving chapters; a book whose title is in heaven, whose introductory thought was the dust of the earth and the image of God, with the breath of life breathed into it when the morning stars sang together, — and whose conclusion shall be when the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, and the earth, with its dust and its ashes, be marked with a great "FINIS."

In fact, the Dane was a master-interpreter of human nature.

"You may judge of my errand yourself," he said, "the saddest that could well be: the troubles between the lord and lady of Castle Foam, and the certainty that the prince, as illegitimate, is soon to be thrust into the cushionless street to make room for the rightful heir."

"Sir count! you astound me. Is it possible that you speak, and that I hear you with these ears?"

"I fancy so. 'Tis ragged, but 'tis true; true as this book of yours." He tapped the book the priest had been reading, into which he had shut his middle finger.

"Let us walk," said the priest, "the very trees have ears."

"I will explain to you briefly. The present prince is son of the former prince by an actress. That actress is still living, and living in Petersburg. This I simply say, to prove later. She could not rear a child. The wife of the prince had given him no heir in ten years of marriage. Women are strangely wrought upon by their legal lords. The princess consented to adopt this child in a secret manner that should result in her claiming it as her own, before it was two months old. No

matter what our preferences may be, it is not right that he should hold this place."

The priest shook his head. "But think of the downfall of the most saintly princess, who in soul and nature is so eminently innocent." Perhaps he was thinking of the five thousand rubles.

"Innocent, yes! But living a sad life to-day."

"I have feared it," said the priest.

This was all the Dane could have asked. He had, wholly without knowledge, made the statement on the ground that in all probability neither one side nor the other was too well known to be contradicted, and finding he was unexpectedly upheld, he at once enlarged upon the first statement.

"This would give her the freedom she is too womanly to seek, granting her a divorce, and when once the shock was over, you must know she would be vastly happier again as countess on the estates of Kramareff."

"But she would take the prince with her."

"Well and good, if she could be happy so," said the Dane, gathering courage and hope of success with each new question, at the same time shaking his head; which the priest might take as he chose, but which in reality meant that that thing would never be.

"But what of the little church?" asked the priest. "The house of Reppoun is strongly German and probably Roman Catholic."

Von Bremen could scarce restrain a smile. "Bravo!" he said to himself. "The noble soul begins to tremble. *Self!* last, mightiest and full when overcome." And then aloud, "True, good father, I know not who the successor may be. I am but acting for justice

under the instruction of an agent of the man who claims the right. But as there are certain things which one in your position can do to make such a change more easily and quietly accomplished, because the laborer is worthy of his hire, I am instructed to say to you that justice must be done, and that it will be done, whether you and I act for or against it; but that if you can, and some suggestions will be given you, and you do help this matter through, if, at the end, you are not satisfied with your position, you shall be granted the place of Patriarch in Syria, chief priest in the church of the Holy Sepulcher. My power to make this offer I will show you to your full satisfaction before a step is taken; and also that if you are satisfied to remain, the sum of five thousand rubles will be paid you for the service." The priest started. He had received five thousand rubles to place the countess's daughter there; strange, strange freak that he should now be offered five thousand rubles to turn her out again! The Dane supposed the start was because his sacred nostrils sniffed the odor of a bribe, and began at once to cover it with perfumed oil, lest it should be offensive.

"That is no bribe, good father, that offers to him that overcometh a crown of life. An evil-minded man alone would charge that our religion is selfishness, because he presses toward the mark with greatest zeal who sees most clearly the prize of his high calling. You may consider yourself fortunate that you may please even one man in the cause of duty. It is oftener that the friend of God goes through this world friendless than full of friends."

The priest almost inaudibly quoted that wretchedly distorted Greek requiem—

> "'Hosts on the earth and hosts below
> Follow the sinner's shroud with their laudations loud,
> Down to the wide gate where many do go.
> Few on the earth follow the dead
> Up to the narrow gate where the bright angels wait,
> Bearing the palm branch and crown for his head!'"

"Exactly so, good father. You are right. Exactly so! And I remember a story," said the Dane, "of one living long ago, a priest, whose meat was locust-bread, and honey from the wild bees. They said, 'Beware of him! He has a devil.' Another priest of the same order coming directly after him, ate and drank with those people like one of themselves, and they said of him, 'A gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.' No, father! it is impossible to please. We must perform our duty, and if rewarded instead of blasphemed we are fortunate."

"I have often read the story," said the priest, smiling.

"Exactly so, good father, exactly so! And you comprehend my words to-night?"

A bending, tottering cripple, as she hobbled past them on her knotted canes, caught the sentence "You comprehend my words to-night?" and strained her old ears to listen further, for she was the twilight raven of Schaumburg, and if any one among the women had a bit of information she wished to spread through the village, her first step was to tell Thurnelda and make her promise never to repeat it. But the wind rushed through the leaves, and she lost the priest's answer.

He placed his reverend finger beside his reverend nose, and said very gravely, "I comprehend the count, and will act as is best and right." He put "best" first, at which the Dane winked to his inner man, and after taking his leave and promising to see the priest again in a day or two, when he should have thought over the matter, he placed his irreverend finger beside his irreverend nose and said to himself, "There is not much question which way the priest will think it *best* to act. These sacerdotal robes turn inside out right easily. I must look sharp and not depend too much, however, for doubtless they turn back again as easily;" and buttoning his coat around him, for the evening coming on was cold, he shuffled away through the dry leaves toward Castle Foam, whose proud dome and turrets loomed grandly toward heaven from the hill before him, the four tapering minarets rising from the main tower yet tinged with the dying glory of the sun that had left the valley below in darkness.

The priest made no move to enter the church, though the villagers were kneeling in many places about the building, waiting for the evening services.

Father Charlovitz opened his book; but, as is often the case with the priest's Bible-reading, the words he repeated were far from the page on which his eyes rested.

> "'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
> And loving favor rather than silver and gold.'

"What is the meaning of all this, I wonder? Some mystery underlies it which I must solve before I act. One thing at least I swear: Never shall word or act

of mine lead to your injury, Lady Princess von Meerschaum, so help me, God of Love!"

He closed the book, and entered the church, not without a premonitory twinge or two of conscience, and an inclination to hide his face as the warm light fell over it, and the old black-eyed Thurnelda seemed looking him through and through.

Von Bremen found his way to the castle. Through the glass of the conservatory he saw the princess by the fountain. He entered noiselessly by the conservatory-door and stood behind her. He was unnerved after his struggle with the priest, an easy task though it may have appeared to the looker-on, and was nervously ransacking his brain for the most politic way to announce himself, when she turned suddenly upon him, exclaiming:

"Good heavens! Monsieur von Bremen, how came you here? I did not look for such an apparition."

To say the least, if Albrecht von Bremen's powers did ever become weary, they were never exhausted. He had yet to find a time when action could be required of him when he could not act. He fell instantly upon one knee, and clasping his hands, said, in a voice that might have been a child's, so plaintive, pleading for mercy:

"Yes, my Lady Princess, Albrecht von Bremen is here, — an unexpected, undesired apparition, abhorred, detested. But he is penitent, and supplicates your mercy, lady. He is driven by a relentless agony to bend to the dust before your feet a head that never yet was bowed for pardon. Remorse, the ghost of an inordinate passion too tamely christened 'Love,'

has dragged him here to ask to be forgiven. Oh, I have suffered enough! Have —"

Here the princess interrupted him. Will the reader recall the position of the wife of Prince Reppoun? — her solitude; her regret at having turned away the friendship of Constantine Wolzonn; her longing for a friend; her query if indeed she might not win her husband's love more easily had she other admirers, and the fact that the first passions of her girlish heart — passions that perhaps were only fancies, though she had thought them love — had been stirred by Albrecht von Bremen, — that first love that a woman's heart never can forget? Will he also remember that in the most romantic, most unsuspicious, most gentle hour of all the twenty-four, this man, never ill-looking except as he looked ill of his own will, supplied with abundant beauty of a certain stamp and a powerful and attractive magnetism, knelt at her feet? — that he was wise, and spoke slowly, asking no answer till the first shock had ample time to wear away, before he condemns her as feeble-hearted or a fool? — that she silenced him with a gesture of her hand, and in a voice that was kind, though not indeed extravagantly friendly, said, "You have made far too much of it, Monsieur von Bremen. For aught of anger I have ever had, I can easily say 'forgiven'"? And yet she asked herself, half doubtingly, "Can the leopard change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin?" and added, "or was I unjust to him in Switzerland?" Time had deadened the edge of the anger she had felt.

There are conditions under which oil and water will flow together. These were fulfilled in that autumn evening in the conservatory of Castle Foam,

and startled by the transition, the princess asked herself, "What am I doing?" But it was already done. The Dane had pressed his lips upon the extended hand, and risen to his feet. The two stood for a moment face to face in the silent shadows, while the fountain trickled its merry, dripping melody, and the flowers around them swung to Eros censers of ravishing perfume.

"May God bless you, lady!" said the Dane at last; "and may I have opportunity to show my gratitude more potently than in words. Can I serve you in any way?"

"Thanks, Monsieur von Bremen, — no. Yet, if you please, you may stay to dinner with me, and let me show my forgiveness by hospitality."

"You would be hospitable, lady, to an enemy. To-day I must decline; but to-morrow, if it please your ladyship."

"To-morrow let it be, at this hour, Monsieur von Bremen."

He bowed to leave her; but as she turned, her hair caught upon an orange-tree. That over-prolific hair was a source of annoyance sometimes. It became more snarled as she attempted to free it, and she tore it off, breaking a leaf, a flower, and a thorn with it.

"Tangles never come out for me," she said. "I could fly sometimes, they vex me so."

"That is quite unnecessary," observed the Dane. "Let me unravel this."

He took the lock in his hand and began to extricate the leaf and flower, when, "Ha!" he dropped the curl.

"What is the matter?" asked the princess.

"Nothing, my lady, only a thorn," he replied, and finished his task.

"How delightfully patient you are!" said the princess with a faint smile. "You would be an invaluable friend to me. I am forever getting into tangles."

The Dane had worked silently, not because he was patient, but because he was superstitious, and was smothering a curse that "only a thorn" hidden in my lady's hair had driven to his lips.

He dropped the thorn on the floor, or intended to, and putting his foot on something very like a thorn, ground the curse into it. Then looking up with the same soft smile, he asked, "Will your ladyship give me this leaf as a palm of victory?"

"With pleasure, monsieur, — or a better."

"None could be better," he said, making a low bow and kissing her hand again. "And now until to-morrow evening, *ch bien*, till to-morrow evening. *Au revoir*, my lady, Princess von Meerschaum."

"Adieu, monsieur."

The princess turned and closed a window by the orange-tree. The wind must have blown it open a finger-breadth. She did not see a figure, wrapped in a cloak as black as the night itself had already become, creep stealthily away from the window, or hear a low voice mutter, "*Eh bien*, to-morrow evening, *eh bien!*" and add, "There appears a tangle deeper than that in my lady's hair."

Having once entered upon this new venture, the novelty pleased the princess well; or, more properly, having once yielded to the spell of the Dane's subtle magnetism, it was easy to yield more and more, and already she enjoyed the thought of meeting him the next evening.

As for the Dane, he had restrained himself till out of the castle, walking down the long road through the park to the great gate on the highway, where the count's coach was to be waiting for him. There his pace quickened, and his face reverted to its lines and wrinkles laid by innate deceitfulness. A hard, cold smile broke over his face, as he hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves.

He threw the orange-leaf on the walk; but returning with the remark, "It would be just my luck to have her find that leaf the first thing in the morning," he calmly hunted for it, found it, dropped it into the pocket of his overcoat, and resumed his rapid pace. The carriage-door stood open. Forgetting the dignity of his years, he leaped in, and rolled over in the robes, convulsed with laughter.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "I've done it at last!" and rubbed his hands. "It's a new idea of mine, and it works like a charm. Sugar is better than salt. 'Head 'em off' is better than run on behind. Dinner to-morrow night. Bah! That reminds me of the ball at the palace later. She's going of course, and I'm going. Never mind! Better not offer to go with her; she might refuse. 'Step by step,' Albrecht. 'Step by step.' Ah, a rich character is that priest Charlovitz! He will be very useful if he be useful at all; and not much in the way if he be not. I—"

He stopped suddenly, for "only a thorn," which had not fallen to the floor but caught in his overcoat, stabbed him again as he rubbed his hands about in self-congratulation.

"Strange omen that, for the second time," he said. "Curse the blasted thorn!" and he began looking for it. But at that moment the coach halted in Count Olendorff's court; halted so suddenly that he was thrown from the seat down among the robes, and in extricating himself he quite forgot the thorn.

Unannounced, he opened the door of Count Olendorff's library. But the old man was wide awake, and in no mood to be over-easily provoked.

"Well, well! Here you are at last. I began to think that Father Baumgarten — "

"Charlovitz, my lord."

"Charlovitz, yes, Charlovitz. Why am I always mixing an orchard and a rustic?"

"Very little difference, on the whole, my lord, very little difference. One drops the fruit, the other picks it up. Call him Baumgarten if you choose."

"No — Charlovitz — Father Charlovitz. What was I saying?"

"You had begun to think that Father — "

"Yes, yes, I remember. I am growing old — so very old;" and he passed his wrinkled hand over his wrinkled forehead, thought of the two-and-eighty years that were registered there, and quite forgot to finish his sentence.

"You had begun to think that Father Charlovitz —"

"Had converted you, and you were waiting to be baptized," exclaimed the old man in an explosive way, as though anxious to get the whole sentence out before he forgot the end of it. Then he shook in a hoarse, crabbed, spasmodic laugh, and Albrecht von Bremen smiled, — but not at the count's joke.

When the Dane's coat, hat, and gloves were thrown

into the corner, and he, seated in the arm-chair which the count had occupied, because it was the best and easiest chair in the room, was sipping the count's wine, a drop of good-natured blood touching his heart persuaded him to say what he had to say, without waiting longer.

"My lord!"

"Hey?" said the old man, looking up from a glass he was filling.

"Oh—er—nothing in particular, nothing in particular. Go on pouring out your wine; I was only saying that I had seen the priest."

"Priest Charlovitz, of Meerschaum?"

"Priest Charlovitz, of Meerschaum."

"I suppose so, yes. And what came of it?"

"I told him of our plans."

"Not all at once?"

"No, not all at once; but about as fast as I could talk and he could listen."

"And what said the priest?"

"That he would not hinder them."

"Possible?"

"Possible, and more. He will take part in them."

"The devil he will!"

"Yes; and the devil and he together will make a strong team, my lord."

"Great Jove! With him you can do anything."

"With whom, my lord, — the devil, the priest, or great Jove?"

"Fie! fie! This is no laughing matter."

"Your lordship is correct. Let us chant a psalm together to solemnize ourselves."

"Be gone! But how about the princess? Lovely

woman! Is there no way she can be kept on the estates, something like the serfs, when the prince is turned away?"

"Have courage, my lord, you shall marry her yet. Or I will for you," he added, in a tone so low that the old ears heard nothing.

"Good Albrecht! good Albrecht! Bring it about! bring it about, and you shall be well rewarded."

"I have succeeded so far as this, my lord," said Albrecht von Bremen, searching the pile in the corner for the pocket that contained the leaf. "Look here! Ha!" Laying down the overcoat again, only a thorn pricked his finger. "A cursed omen that, for the third time! When I speak with the princess it stabs me, when I think of the priest it stabs me, when I talk with the count it stabs me again. Into the fire, damned thorn!" and into the fire it went. Only a blue flutter in the flame for an instant and it was gone forever, yet Albrecht von Bremen had feared it as though it were a god.

"What did you say you had?" the old man asked.

"Oh—er—yes, I remember; this: A leaf! Emblem of—er—well, of fidelity, or something else, placed there by the princess's own fingers."

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Be careful you don't tamper with her heart, Albrecht! Leave that for me to do."

"Jealous already," said the Dane. "But what do you think of it all?"

"It was well done," said Count Olendorff.

CHAPTER V.

MY WIFE.

EARLY the next morning Father Charlovitz was in his little study, built like a dove's cote, under the low eaves in the rear of the little church, sitting by a small round table, wandering through the archives *de l'esprit*.

Beside the table, two chairs, a small library, one little window, a little corner closet for wine and biscuit and gowns, and a little hearth for fire, made, on the whole, a very respectable study.

A bright fire had crackled and blazed on the hearth when he sat down, but long ago only lines of white ashes, rounded like the sticks, showed how they had lain across each other, and far down in the middle of the ash-coats faint glimmers of red appeared, as a chance draught swept up chimney.

The sunbeams did away with the need of a fire, and poured through the little window in a way to indicate high noon in the village.

Books lay open on the table; paper, pen and ink beside them; but the paper was covered with hieroglyphics, and the books were unread.

The determination to write seized the good father. Sermons were just coming into vogue in the most civilized of the churches, and such original men as

Father Charlovitz were well pleased with it. He wiped his pen carefully upon a pincushion, where many blots and blurs told a sad story of unparliamentary usefulness, and began upon a sermon; the same sermon that he began to write six hours before on the hieroglyphic sheet.

For fifteen minutes the scratch and scrawl of a busy pen filled the little room with noise, that seemed like a cannonading to the priest. Then all was still again, and the pen was diving deep into a crack in the table.

A rap sounded on the little door.

The priest frowned.

"What unnecessary interruption is this, I wonder?" he asked himself as he opened the door.

A farmer from some distance out of the village wanted this representative of the Great Shepherd to look at a little lamb of the flock that lay dying.

"We've not much money," said the farmer, apologetically.

Father Charlovitz had a kind heart, and answered as gently as a woman, "Then I shall come for little. I will be there sharp at three o'clock."

He shut the door, and again began to write. Another rap and another frown, which disappeared, however, when he opened the door and found a girl of about eighteen asking admittance.

"Come in, little Marie," he said, smiling; "I have looked for you."

She crossed herself, left her wooden shoes at the door. Her little feet were as brown as the sun could burn them, and clean as water could wash them, and treading daintily the polished floor, she took a long basket from her shoulders, leaning it against the wall

as a gentleman would have done with his cane. Then she made another courtesy, crossed herself again, and sat down on a stool the priest had placed before the fire for her. Way down in the depths of that long basket there was a baby snugly rolled away.

"Mother said I shouldn't come," the girl began, "and that I'd no business to be running to your Reverence so much. But I knew he'd be there for the money before night, so when she sent me out with the baby to work in the garden, I just left the hoe and ran away."

There was not a child in Schaumburg afraid to empty her entire little heart to Father Charlovitz. He smiled and replied, "It is a dangerous thing to disobey your mother, little Marie, but more dangerous to disobey your priest. I told you to come yesterday."

"And so I did," the girl replied quickly, not at all frightened by the rebuke; "but as I crossed the bridge, down by the park, a great man's coach stopped right in front of me, and one man got out and ran till he caught up with you; so I didn't come any more."

Heinrich Charlovitz bent his head unnecessarily low over the fire as he put the fresh sticks on, for the child was looking at him, and young eyes see more than older ones sometimes.

He asked carelessly, "And how of the others in the coach?"

"There was only one, good father, an old man with very white hair and a white beard on his upper lip; and the coach turned round, and he was driven away."

The priest began to blow the fire. "Count Olen-

dorff," he muttered. "There's no good comes when he 's a finger in. I had suspected that '*Eh bien*, till to-morrow evening,' which now means to-night."

He went hastily to the corner-closet, and took out the purse which the princess had given him.

"Here is the money to pay your rent, Marie," he said. "You may take enough to pay it for a year. It is from our good lady. You must pray for her, Marie."

"Indeed, good father, we always do. Mother says we are never to forget, as it is about all we can do for them at the castle, who are so kind to us."

"That is good teaching, Marie; and God will bless you and them too for your prayers. He, up there in the bright blue sky, is no respecter of persons, and thinks as much of the prayers little Marie prays at the altar, as the great lady at the castle thinks of those beautiful pearls she wore on her wedding-day. Do you remember it, so long ago?"

"Indeed I do, good father. Mother took me up to the castle with the rest. Will the angels in heaven be so beautiful and wear such pearls?" asked the girl, as she shouldered the basket and baby.

"Just as fine, Marie. You, too, if you are honest and true."

Marie went away firmly resolved to be honest and true, and the priest turned to his table, but not to his writing.

"What an inordinate tangle things are in!" he said, a moment later. "That little man would be an invaluable friend to me just now. How easily he could unravel it." Heinrich Charlovitz smiled. "He promised me I should go to Jerusalem, and be chief of the

Greek priests there. That is something; and what else will come with it? Plenty of honor? Yes; no equals in my own creed. Plenty of luxury. Plenty of ease. Plenty of servants. Plenty of solitude. Plenty of worship, all day and every day, close by the Holy Sepulcher, or where fanatic pilgrims think it ought to be. Plenty of holy companions." His lips curved a little, as who should say, "not the best company after all, in some cases." Then he shrugged his shoulders and arched his eyebrows, and added, "Plenty of pricks from my conscience, too, I am much inclined to fear."

Slowly, very slowly in fact, he repeated the Wise Man's words:

> "By humility and the fear of the Lord
> Are riches and honor and life.
> Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward.
> He that keepeth his soul shall be far from them."

It was a doubtful warfare between the flesh and the spirit, and was far from ended when night had come again, and the castle was but a dim, dark dream against the sky. The linden grove, that shaded the conservatory in summer and shielded it in winter, was but a shadow, a shade darker than the clouds, and the lake just beyond it a sheet of jetty black, broken only by an occasional reflection, when now and then a star shimmered, white or yellow, through the clouds, or a silver lining tipped one of the heavy drifts as it swept beneath the moon.

Father Charlovitz crouched in a corner where the conservatory joined the castle, wrapped from head to foot in a thick fur cloak, the cowl drawn over the square black cap.

He had forced a window open a crack and fastened it, close beside a table that had been arranged inside, with preparations for tea.

"This," said he, as he fastened the window, "is the only perfect confessional, no matter how honest the one who kneels may be."

His patience was almost spent. "Dinner is lasting long," he said. "'And there was much eating and hard drinking among the sons and the daughters after Irad and Mehujeal, before the son of Lamech the cursed floated over their bodies in the ark.' But why should I think of that to-night? I am conjuring up omens, when in faith I would eat a little and drink a little myself, if I had the opportunity."

Suddenly, as his eyes were growing dull and his ears heavy, they were startled from their lethargy by the voice of the princess, as, with that haughty air which so well became the lady of Castle Foam, she entered the conservatory. Costly ermine clung to almost invisible gauze about her shoulders, by its contrast adding beauty, and in its purity seeming like floating frost about her figure. Diamonds sparkled on her neck, and shot many-hued and brilliant darts from her matchless wrists and fingers. A smile, such as had rarely graced her face in the ten years, made dazzling the beauty of her dark, soft eyes. Close behind her, smiling and blinking, walked the Dane.

The priest had crept to the open window. He shook his head decidedly as he watched the two, muttering, "Lady, lady! Holy things are not for dogs, nor pearls for swine. They will trample them under foot and turn again and rend you."

Well had Albrecht von Bremen played his cards

in this short game. He played in right good earnest. He played to win. It was the last game of three. The first he had lost when reaching to gather in the stakes. The second was a bad game for him from the first. And the third! He *must* win the third, for he had good cause to fear that the wrath of Reppoun would keep him, if possible, out of the estates of Kramareff, and it would be possible unless the princess were won before. He had no fear, however, of the prince ever reaping a personal advantage from his wife's property, for he had looked well to that, and found, far back in the first covenant between the crown and Kramareff, that the title and gold should be forfeited to the next in line, if an heir Von Kramareff married one not noble-born.

"How have you spent your time since we parted so unhappily?" asked the princess.

"Chiefly in remorse."

"Then we will drop the past."

"Yes, my lady, and think of the present. Such joy after such sorrow is heaven supplementing hell. You laugh! You will not realize. But you have not known the pang, how could you know the pleasure?"

"But how long will it last, think you? I gave you once my little heart. You threw it way, 'all for the love of me,' you tell me now. Then you asked me for it again, and because I would not give it back, you were angry. This time you ask forgiveness, and I have forgiven. How long —"

"Forever," the Dane interrupted her. "All the stock of ingratitude and rage are spent, and only penitence remains."

"We shall see. I grant you a trial."

"A happy probation!" exclaimed the Dane. "If by a thought I forfeit your favor, may Nemesis be your friend!"

"Woman needs no friend, monsieur, to urge her to vengeance."

"Well said, my lady! Woman's vengeance is enough alone; her smile is heaven in itself!"

"You are very happy, monsieur."

"By you made happy, my lady."

"Then I am happy that it is so."

"And, my lady princess, if there should ever be a time when an act of Albrecht von Bremen's could make you happier, com—"

"A very faithful friend I doubtless should find."

"—Wanting!" What was it whispered "wanting"? Was it a fancy? It sounded very real. It made her shudder. Or was it only a chill draught from the window beside her, that she discovered was open a crack?

She turned to close the window. It stubbornly refused. The Dane tried, and failed. She said it was of no consequence, and he sat down again.

"I have something to tell you," said the Dane.

"What is it?"

"You will not believe it."

"I will, if you speak truly."

"How will you know if I speak truly?"

"I shall see it in your eyes."

Their eyes met. What was more natural? The Dane knew well the magnetic power of his two eyes. The princess felt it; she had felt it before. She shuddered; she felt herself absorbed — her strength drawn out of her, her will bound and thrown one

side. She was conquered; and yet she was happy — strangely, fearfully happy. She smiled; she laughed. The Dane was satisfied.

"Before I tell you," said he, "give me a token that you will not be angry."

"What shall it be?"

"A flower, lady."

"This one?" She touched an exquisite bud fastened to her brooch. The Dane knelt at her feet in assent.

She broke the stem and placed the flower in his buttonhole. He clasped her hand in his and kissed it passionately. She smiled again.

Still kneeling, one hand resting in hers in her lap, his eyes fastened upon hers, and becoming momentarily more powerful, he began:

"My lady princess, it was not all for the love I bore you, not all a selfish interest, that drove me to speak as I did in this room eleven years ago. I did it for your good. I knew that you were destined to be the wife of Victor Reppoun if you consented. For your sake I tried to stop it. Now you are angry," he said, slowly rising, without taking his eyes from hers.

"No, monsieur, I am not angry; and yet your words are cruel."

"They are not, lady. You do not understand. These years may have been Paradise to you. I know nothing of them. The future I feared for you has been long delayed. It has only been within my power to watch, and, little as you have thought it, I have been watching like a hound upon your doorsteps. I have come at last, braved the danger of

being spurned by you and driven as a rogue away, to warn you that a terrible future is very near."

She shuddered. His words were having the right effect. She murmured:

"What is it?"

"This," he continued: "Do you know that by royal grant the estates Von Kramareff are forfeited by the heir who marries one not of noble birth?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you have done it."

She would have sprung to her feet — have annihilated the man before her — torn him in shreds — in a burst of sudden rage that overwhelmed her; but those two strange eyes held her firmer than fetters to her chair.

"Stay!" he continued. "You have promised that you will not be angry. You must not be till I have finished. In Switzerland you spurned me as a 'miserable pauper.' That I was not quite, for I am noble-born; and had you married me, as I would have been your slave and footstool for your life to have you do, your titles and estates would always have been yours. Instead of this, you married Victor Reppoun, who is within a month to be a miserable pauper."

The princess did not even strive, by look, or word, or motion, to count this an insult. She sat utterly powerless, her eyes riveted upon those of the Dane; and his thumbs crept into the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head hung well upon one side, and his eyes half closed themselves, as he stood for a moment in silence.

When he spoke again it was in such a soft, gentle tone that it seemed almost choked with tears:

"He is an illegitimate child, and not the legal heir to Meerschaum. Unfortunately, the next in line has long known it, — long been searching for proof to justify his claim. I learned but yesterday that he had armed himself till he was satisfied. Victor Reppoun will be driven from Meerschaum. If you retain your allegiance you will be exiled from Kramareff. From this royal position you have held for ten years you will become the wife of a beggar that cannot buy his daily bread except it be by the sweat of the brow. Now, lady princess, Albrecht von Bremen has not loved you against so much without a strong heart to love. He loves you still. In less than a month the prince will fall. If you will be the wife of Albrecht von Bremen then, renouncing those other vows as taken in ignorance, you may retain your name and station in society. Once more I ask you, will you be my wife? I give you time to think; I ask no answer till you are ready to answer me."

His card was played, his venture run. His eyes fell. He sat down by the table opposite her chair. The spell was broken.

There was no furious madness now, no glaring and gnashing of teeth. She rose to her feet with all the dignity of the wife of Prince Reppoun.

She spoke slowly: "Monsieur von Bremen, I am ready to answer you now. Once, twice, three times, *I tell you No!* This is a change I have been longing for. I hail it with a cry of joy. At last I will be such a wife as Victor Reppoun shall honor with his love, whom he can no longer pay with luxuries. My brow shall sweat with his, and together we will earn our daily bread."

She seemed to wait for an answer. Strangely, the Dane had listened as though he had expected just that reply. He even smiled when he supplied the silence, sayinp, "My noble lady will not forget her promise not to be angry with the unfortunate Dane?"

"I am not angry, Monsieur von Bremen," she replied, softened perceptibly by this unexpected plea. "I can offer you no reward for your kindness, if I am to be a pauper, but I can thank you, and I do; and you may ever remember that a pauper's prayers, which are as potent as the prayers of a princess, will be offered for your safety in return for the anxiety you have had for mine."

The Dane was visibly puzzled by this, but he left Castle Foam as calmly as he came, actually saying to himself, as he was driven through the great portals on the highway, "The Princess von Meerschaum is more mine than she thinks herself."

CHAPTER VI.

MY WIFE (CONTINUED).

WHILE the conversation of the last chapter was going on within the conservatory, what of the priest outside? He had not heard the last of the matter. The princess's reply had been spoken to a confessional without a confessor. Why? Chiefly and obviously because he did not belong there. Indeed he had received a very feeling conviction of that fact in the course of the evening, and had changed his mind upon more subjects than one.

As the conversation had grown interesting he had given closer and closer attention to it. He had become so excited, in fact, that his anger had once run away with him. He had added to an expression of the princess the significant word "wanting," and added it so loud that it had almost closed up his confessional.

He did not notice when the wind blew fiercely round the corner into his hiding-place, nor when for a moment it died away, and the moon shone cold and clear over the castle and lawn and lake. But the wind blew, and occasionally the moon shone, nevertheless.

He had not heard the wheels of a calèche roll over the cold ground and stop at the castle, but they rolled and they stopped, and the Prince Reppoun alighted.

His face was pale, his step was slower than usual, but without calling a servant he hurried up a private staircase from a side door where he had entered. and seen by no one was in his own apartments. He changed his traveling suit for evening dress. He had not even taken off his clothes, with the exception of one night at Arantha, since leaving the castle. Then with a sigh he threw himself upon a divan, and lit a cigarette.

"And now," he said, "Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew, comes back again. Comes back another man!" He registered the vow with a firm planting of his hand on a marble table beside him. "It has dawned upon me, late to be sure, but better late than never, that I have not suffered alone, but have been making a martyr of my wife. She has been strangely true to me. How have I rewarded her? True, I have not been false to her, yet I have not been true. She has been everything the heart of man could ask to me. I have been nothing, absolutely nothing, but what the law requires to her. Now for reformation! As I have worshiped a fantastic ideal in Kathi Chichkini,"—he shrugged his shoulders and shuddered, for he had not yet forgotten the pang which those words had caused him, "daughter of a Russian nobleman,"—"I will worship the loveliness represented in my wife. I will live for her only, as she is living for me alone. I will find her and surprise her. If she smile a welcome it is my omen of success."

He threw the cigarette away, and at the foot of the broad staircase asked a page, who knelt and touched the floor with his forehead to welcome his master, "Where is the princess?"

The boy was slow to rise. Servants know every-

thing. It had spread like wild-fire through the castle, in spite of every precaution, that the mistress, their sainted, perfect mistress, had a lover. But the boy must answer, and with his head still bowed, he stammered, "In the conservatory, master."

The prince turned his steps toward the winter garden. At the door of the corridor leading thither an older servant bowed to the floor, but rising quickly, laid his hand upon the latch.

"Not that way, not that way, master," hardly knowing what he said. "Did your Highness wish to see the lady princess? Let me call her."

"And why not go myself?" asked the prince, puzzled by the behavior, for it was not the custom at Castle Foam to make suggestions to the lord of the house.

"She has — she has —"

"Has what?"

"A friend, master."

The servant fell on his knees again. The prince did not notice him, but walked slowly away. Turning, as he lit a cigarette, he said, "I am tired, I am going to my room. Do not disturb her, I will see her in the morning."

Ten minutes later, protected by high boots, a fur pelisse, and Zibelline cap, he left a side door of the castle and approached the conservatory, upon the opposite side of which knelt the priest Charlovitz.

"A fire from hell consumes me!" he muttered. "Am I gone mad to be thus willingly degraded to a damnable eavesdropper? Not I! I will turn back. Yet something infernal drives me on. She is not false to me — nay; but I must see it, and believe."

Again he approached the conservatory. At first he saw but faintly two shadows through the leaves. But nearer, and the whole picture was before him, only hidden in part by Venus rising from her shell.

He shaded his eyes and peered through the window, as she laughed till her sunlight hair trembled over her shoulders, and the ermine on the gauze seemed floating like a cloud about her, while the smile made perfect the beauty of those dark, soft eyes, and the diamonds flashed upon her neck and matchless wrists and fingers. She was looking into the eyes of a stranger, and the stranger, with his back toward the prince, was evidently looking into hers.

"Good God in heaven!" burst from the trembling lips that were very near the glass. "She never smiled on me like that! She never looked so beautiful for me, or I too should have loved her long ago."

Did the princess know that that smile won for her the victory she had shed so many bitter tears to win?

"Great heaven! and what now?" gasped the prince, staggering on his feet, as she touched a bud hanging upon her brooch, and the man before her knelt at her feet. "How long, how long has this been going on, and I, blind fool, have laughed at it? And now! she takes a flower from her bosom and gives it him! Oh ye immortal gods, see how he kisses her, and how she smiles!"

He brushed away the moisture on the pane that had gathered from his breath, but not satisfied with the imperfect picture, staggered and stumbled, groping his way about the conservatory.

"How have I been duped!" he groaned. "Great God, how have I been consummately defrauded!

My wife! damned name! Cursed may I be that I have ever called her that! Aye, and I have been cursed for it."

He had gained the side upon which the priest knelt, but the priest had neither eyes nor ears for anything without. The frosty air as he turned the corner fanned from his forehead great drops of perspiration, and cooled the blood in the swollen, throbbing veins. But only the trees saw, and a lonely night-hawk screamed an unmelodious note of sympathy.

"Who is he? Who is he? I have seen that man before," he muttered eagerly as he crept nearer. He was kneeling before the princess now, clasping her hand in his. Then he rose slowly to his feet.

"She looks her very life out of her eyes to him. Ah, she must love him tenderly," said the prince, as he still crept nearer. Then asked himself again, "Who is he?"

As if all unconsciously moved to answer the question, the man paused in what he was saying, and hung his hands by his thumbs in the pockets of his pantaloons, and his head well upon one side, and his eyes, still fastened on those of the princess, half closed themselves.

"*Ha!*" groaned the prince, stopping spellbound where he stood. "You knew the prince, my father? Yes! and because I have not given you that golden quieter you asked, for some accursed lie you conjured up, oh! God-forsaken villain! you have kept your threat and are drawing your thirty pounds a month in this way out of Meerschaum! And *she*, Lady of Castle Foam, is *amouring with a devil!* I will go back, I will see no more. Go on with your —"

He was suddenly silenced by a motion in a black mass close by the window.

"What! what!" he gasped, "another eavesdropper prying into the secrecies of Castle Foam? Such secrecies!" He ground his teeth and silently approached the figure.

A moment later, all his gathered rage centering in the grip, he had the figure by the throat, the body under one strong arm, and with it entered the linden grove at rapid strides.

The priest Charlovitz, choking so suddenly, became bewildered. He struggled to escape; it was useless. He tried to shout; it was equally in vain. Had the devil got him and started off, body and soul, fur cloak and all? He was inclined to think so. And yet it occurred to him even in that strait, that the smell of burning fur would be an unwelcome effluvium for even Beelzebub's nostrils. Still he was not on his way to heaven, he felt sure of that, and he was evidently on his way somewhere. He threw every ounce of faith into a silent prayer for mercy. He would have run the chance of the devil and crossed himself, but he could not move a hand. He gulped a breath and howled "*Murder!*" but before the word was half spoken the fingers tightened about his throat, and it ended in a faint whistle.

His eyes started from their sockets as though they were ready to leave him, if they might thereby open a vent channel to his lungs.

The fur cowl was drawn close over the priest's head, and the prince had not taken the trouble to look under it, so that entirely ignorant of what bones and flesh he might have under his arm, he threw the

burden at last, face down, upon the ground, still holding it fast by the throat.

Second thought came half-way to the rescue of the priest. The prince had had a moment to consider. He had no right to wipe out all of his anger on this being; he even let his cloak still cover him, lest he should hurt him more than he intended, and forthwith administered a sounder thrashing than even he supposed the man deserved.

The second thought had crept a little into the background again as the thrashing went on and the prince became excited in the work, till at last, exhausted but unsatisfied, he loosed his hand from about the neck, and yielded to the temptation to strike one blow with his open hand upon the cowl, near where his victim's ear must be. And the blow fell heavily enough, for the prince was such a man of strength as seldom is found in a castle. Lurid meteors flashed and floated about Father Charlovitz for an instant, then all was dark and he seemed falling, falling with frightful rapidity into blackness. Insensibly he sprang to save himself. The effort threw him upon his back. Faintly the moonlight fell over his insensible face. The prince stood erect, folded his arms, and looked at him in blank astonishment.

"Of all men of St. Petersburg," said he at length, "the last man I should have looked for there was Father Charlovitz. I hope I have not killed the priest."

He was too thoroughly broken up in mind and body to care seriously whether he had or not, and leaving the matter to chance, he walked slowly to the castle and locked himself into his library.

A finger of fire had been writing on the wall of Babylon's sanctum. Were the words in the indicative mode and perfect tense, or was there yet an opportunity, a possible potential?

It was surely very late. Day, year, and life were waning. The clock struck ten. Hoarfrost had gathered on the track. Silver threaded Prince Victor's chestnut hair. Was it too late?

Heinrich Charlovitz had come to his senses just in time to hear the last hope of the prince, to realize who it was that had given him the pounding, and that he was left with that heartless wish to die or recover, as the case might be. Very slowly he gathered in one limb after another, testing each carefully to find that no bones were broken; then, with many a twinge and groan gaining his feet, he answered the object that was then far away entering the castle:

"No, no, my lord, you have not killed the priest; and as I *live*, Prince Victor von Meerschaum, you shall yet smart for every blow that you have given me, until you learn that Heinrich Charlovitz's will is as powerful to do vengeance as that strong arm of yours!"

Having delivered himself of this saintly indignation, he began to rub his forehead, which was now aching furiously, and to hobble down toward quiet little Schaumburg with its rushing little river.

Possibly Father Charlovitz was a man whose name was registered in the high courts above as "good," for he had at least lived by the law and the gospel from his youth up, and never transgressed in any way one of the Ten Commandments. He had made a great sacrifice, too, leaving father, mother, home,

wealth, and comparative luxury, to enter the service of the Church. But, after all, it takes the fire to try; and fire tried Father Charlovitz hotter and hotter, till a time came when the pure gold was found.

Hitherto his path, though taken as a cross, had been shaded with palm-trees and bordered with flowers. In long years of unmarred intimacy he had begun to consider himself wholly an equal with the Prince Reppoun; now he suddenly discovered that the prince thought differently. He came upon a bed of thorns in his world of flowers, not only on this side and the other, but right in the middle. Should he peacefully walk through them, or rebel? Such words as "Give him thy coat," and "Turn again the other also," were not in the book as he read it to himself.

As he reached the door of his little home he turned and looked at the sky, where clouds were piling up thicker and heavier under the moon. He pressed his hand on his throbbing temple; it appeared to be swelling. He gave as the result of his investigation, either weatherwise or heartwise, "A storm is brewing."

CHAPTER VII.

MY HUSBAND.

THE same evening found General Wolzonn sitting in the cosy library of the Frau von Ockel.

He had sat up all night, the night before, pondering, silently pondering. The night-wind had howled at his window; and, like Tousa, who accounted the dripping of water over the rocks of her cave as demons mocking her, he thought he heard in the wild notes of the wind fiendish whisperings and unearthly laughing.

"Ha, ha!" it cried, "you're lost! now you're lost! What a fool you have been! But not a straw care I for that, nor does any one else, you murderer! Look out for yourself! There's a place all ready and waiting for you in that Seventh Circle of boiling blood guarded by Charon and the Centaurs! That's where they take such murderers as you, and give them Siberia for a half-way house!"

Then the wind died away with a whip and a whirr, and a farewell shout of "Murderer! yes, murderer!" and morning came.

With the earliest daylight Constantine Wolzonn wrote out his resignation, and putting on his cloak and most unostentatious hat, hurried through backways and by-ways to the rear entrance of the council-

chamber. Hardly a soul was abroad at that early hour, but from the few whom he met he shrank as from enemies. Every one seemed watching him, and saying over and over, as he passed them, "Murder, murderer, murder." For, surely, if the Princess von Meerschaum knew of it, many others must. What peril he had lived in! For how long, he had no idea; but the last straw had broken the camel's back. He had faced the danger for thirty years; now he had turned to run, and having turned, it seemed impossible for him to run fast enough. The houseman, who had charge of the chambers, came only half dressed to open the door. Rubbing his sleepy eyes, he pulled it open just a crack, and looked out, muttering something about "midnight and daylight," and "running enough to murder a man."

The officer started! another accuser, that was all; and having delivered the paper, he hurried away. As he was diving through a yet dusky alley, a voice accosted him.

"Ah—er—yes, General Wolzonn," it said.

"Von Bremen," he hissed, without lifting his eyes. "Just the man I was looking for."

"H'm," replied the Dane; "and where were you looking?"

"Everywhere."

"Yes, I see, I have—er—just come from there."

Once within his own apartments with the Dane, the officer shut the door with a sigh of relief that said, "That shall not open again till things are changed;" and he remembered how Albrecht von Bremen had bound him there in that same room five-and-twenty years before; how he had made of him a knave, that

was worse even than a murderer, to cover up the crime, and how, in every year since then, he had lain beneath his heel, peacefully enduring and doing everything required of him to pacify the man who knew his secret, and how he had just discovered that he had simply been betrayed.

"There, sir!" he said, striking his sword-scabbard on the floor, feeling the shackels bursting, and himself a man for the first time since he had worn a beard.

"H'm — where?" inquired the Dane.

"Right here," said the officer fiercely. "Villain, you have been false to me: you have told my secret. Henceforth I have done with you. Do what you choose with all you know of me. Fling it on the winds, write it on the clouds. Shout it from any window there, I will not stop you. You! more treacherous than the Friar Alberigo, at last I do defy you!"

The officer, growing more excited as he went on, almost howled his defiance; while one of the secrets of Albrecht von Bremen's power lay in the fact that never in his long life had he been known to be excited, never to speak a word in haste, never to say two words when he was angry, if one would do. He appeared now, as upon every crisis of his life, as though he had expected just this, and was, on the whole, rather happy to hear it.

"Have you — er — have you finished?" he asked, in a quiet, careless way.

"Finished," said the general, with profound dignity, and yet a sense that after all his importance, freedom and manhood were oozing out of him.

"And thought well of the results?"

"I have." The officer's pride went up a notch. He was standing the catechism well so far.

"Of your commission?"

"It is resigned."

A smile played about the eyes of the Dane. Why was it that it suddenly appeared to the officer as an act of absurd cowardice, this running to the council with his resignation? His self-importance dropped way down. He was not so much a man as he thought for.

"H'm —"

The general still stood with his back by the door, but as the Dane thus began, a strange knocking at the knees caused him to look about for a chair. The Dane went on: "Now that I have listened to you, suppose you —er—er— "

"Pray, sir, proceed," said the officer, trying to stop the leak with a little bravado.

"So I will, yes —er— I will take your position, and without ceremony say: Do what you will with my secret. Toss it to the winds. Borrow Gabriel's trumpet and howl it round the world. What harm will it do me? I did not steal her. *You stole her.* Why did you not have a man who deserted your division arrested and shot, instead of supporting him in Poland?"

The drowning man saw a straw floating past him. He grasped it.

"But I will bring the girl back," he exclaimed, desperately. "I will repair the damage I have done, come what may of it, and I will have the satisfaction at least of knowing that I have ruined your plans in exchange for the ruin you have laid on me."

"Not so fast, general." The Dane was smiling, much as if he were watching a baby flogging a rocking-horse that was a little unruly. "What would you do with the girl if you brought her back? You've not the first idea of who she is."

"The daughter of a Russian nobleman," exclaimed the officer, still clinging to the straw.

"Ah — so she is! Somewhere between Crimea and Lapland, unless I lied to you, and a corpse at that, may be; and, more than that, were she intelligently standing upon the tomb of her father, and you with drawn sword by her side, I have no plans to be hurt thereby; and, more than that, you might search for her till your bones were dust and not find her. You have not been over-faithful with my charge either. But I make no complaint. You think she is still at Arantha, but when I relieved you of the burden of supporting her, I also relieved the miller of his care. I do not like to trust deserters, and at this moment she is mother of—er—er— well, of a son or daughter, as the case may be, some nine years old and more, living far away from Arantha. Now what do you propose to do?"

The general was silent. What could he do?

"There is nothing left me, as I see, but to take myself away, to some spot where I can live at peace." He was a fool to say that, and he knew it before the words were more than spoken; but that was the time he always discovered that he had been a fool.

"You may go," said the Dane quietly, "but before you go there is something I should be—er—er—yes, very much obliged to you if you will do for me."

"I refuse," said the officer, doggedly planting his back against the door again.

The Dane did not appear to have heard him, though the officer spoke over-loud. He went on as quietly as though he had not been interrupted: "There is a superannuated actress living in miserable quarters in Petersburg. Here is her address. She is a good woman and deserves better quarters. I want her established in elegant apartments. This, if you—er—if you please, you will see to before you go, and give me the location of the apartments you select, or when you go, it will of course be to Siberia. You are a murderer, an abducter, a harborer of deserters from the Russian army. That is a bad record for a man who has lived for thirty years upon the government. But I must be going. I have made a longer call than was necessary."

Albrecht von Bremen rose quietly as he spoke and walked directly toward the door barred by the back of a man reputedly one of the bravest officers in the Russian army, armed to the teeth, and impregnated through and through with the bitterest hatred for him. The officer moved from the door and let him pass. He knew he would.

When his master was gone, Constantine Wolzonn threw himself down by the table. There lay the address on a small piece of paper. He took it savagely, crushed it in his hand, and had almost thrown it in the fire, when he waited.

"I might as well go to Siberia," he said; but he did not believe it. Freedom was sweet, even though it were freedom to exile one's self from his country, instead of being driven into exile. "I've paid a

dearer price than this," he said, "for less of liberty." The result of it all was, that he did precisely as Albrecht von Bremen expected he would do. The dilapidated actress was placed in such quarters as answered the brief directions, and the address sent to the Dane, when Constantine Wolzonn, nothing but a miserable, cowardly cat's-paw after all, in his own estimation at least, sat in Frau von Ockel's library.

The Dane had gained his point, and might have been satisfied; but he was not fully satisfied.

"So Wolzonn is going away," he said, "and Charlovitz must take his place. But I do not like Charlovitz. He is not to be depended on. Curse it all! This telling about the murder comes from Olendorff. Were it not for that little estate of his he's willed to me, I'd grind the old man in the dust for his foolishness. But Israel is full of years and blind. Let him die in peace."

The Dane stopped before a toy-shop window, to watch the curious working of a toy, gotten up by some distorted mind to tickle the fancy of wonder-loving children. A cat, worked by machinery that was wound up like a clock, spent the day in leaping after a mouse that, worked by the same machinery, passed the day running out of one hole and into the other, just before the cat reached it. He stood before that cat till one would have thought its mechanism would have lost all wonder, even to a child. He saw, however, not a cat, but Albrecht von Bremen leaping after expectations.

"H'm! Yes, that is I," came hissing from between his teeth; "driven by a spring men call ambition. Jumping, jumping, jumping, for three-and-fifty years,

and I never yet did anything but load my shoulders with sin and curses, and cheat a few such fools as Olendorff for bread to eat, and clothes to wear, from one day till the next. And by-and-by when I run down, then I must stop. No one will wind me up again. There she goes! Catch him!" he hissed; but the cat was just too late.

"And so it will be with you and me, on to the end of the chapter," thought the Dane; and he walked away with a heavy heart, though his face showed none of it when he met the Princess von Meerschaum at dinner.

"But your turn to suffer will come some day," thought General Wolzonn; and he wished it might come soon. He was frowning savagely at the fire, when the Frau von Ockel came into the library. She was a German, widow of a Russian officer, who had fought shoulder to shoulder with Constantine Wolzonn. Every one called her "frau," with much the same pleasure which we in America take in calling a Frenchman "monsieur;" and every one loved Frau von Ockel.

> "Ah! if our souls but poise and swing
> Like the compass in its brazen ring,
> Ever level, ever true,
> To the toil and task we have to do,
> We shall sail securely, and safely reach
> The Fortunate Isle and the shining beach."

So sailed the widow of Colonel von Ockel. It grew visibly brighter in the library as she entered, and the frown on the officer's forehead insensibly decreased. He had dined with her. They had long been friends; she was every one's friend, especially when there was

any heart aching or bodily suffering, or anything particularly happy going on. Then, as for General Wolzonn, he had also been her husband's best friend for years, so that of all others he was always welcome. He had come to tell her he was going away, but could not gather courage.

"General Wolzonn, I protest!" she exclaimed. "You are not in the field to-day, and that look is too savage for even your quarters at the citadel." Then, with a merry laugh, she fanned the fire. She was not too proud to do anything useful, this amiable, many thought angelic, woman; but from morning till night she was moving about with a kind word and a smile, and a loving turn of her hand for every one that needed help. Rich or poor, it was quite the same to her. Hard work or easy, she sacrificed anything and often everything for others; and all in that happy way that made the receiver doubt if it were really any sacrifice at all. Every one knew Frau von Ockel, from the great Tzar downward and the poor beggar upward; yes, they all loved her. Every one confessed to her. She knew more secrets than any priest, and had true-hearted sympathy and advice, if not absolution.

Very few ever spent the hours as she spent many, among the poor and the lowly, without being unintentionally set one side by the high-headed nobility as a sort of half nun incapable of anything but insipid goodness. Of her they only laughed and said, "The frau is trying to bind up as many wounds as her valiant husband made."

She was, indeed, incapable of anything but goodness, but that person was yet to be found so haughty

as not to recognize Frau von Ockel with a smile at any time, and who did not agree with all who knew her that she was one of the sweetest, pleasantest, and best little women in the land.

"It was Lady Shahovska who called," she continued; "she's quite talked me into going to the ball at the palace to-night. I take back all that I said about staying at home, and you must go with me."

The officer at first rebelled; he had no thought or desire to go to such a place, and besides that, he had been so unfortunate as to arrange everything and prepare himself to leave Russia forever early the next morning. He was anxious to get off before the Dane had time to ask any more favors of him. He had enough yet to do at his quarters to prevent him from spending the night at the palace; yet the thought presented itself that the princess his cousin would be there, and the hope of seeing her face just once more, seeing it enlivened by the surroundings of a banquet, if not happy, aided Frau von Ockel to victory. It never occurred to him that it was not till entering the library, and finding him so low-spirited, she had supposed herself able to go.

He sought in vain for the princess, however, through every room opened to the guests. It was an unheard-of thing for her to be absent, but evidently she was not there. He was leaning against the wall, in a vacant, dimly-lighted side chamber, when Frau von Ockel, passing through, discovered him.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed, "why must I always find you in the most out-of-the-way corner of everything? Come, tell me, what are you doing out here alone?"

"Ah, my dear Lady von Ockel!" said the general, thanking good fortune for this golden opportunity to ask a word of advice from one whom every one trusted, "I am in a very sad state of mind; will you help me out of it?"

"I will try and see," she replied. "Come, here are just two chairs in the entire room."

"No, no, my lady. What I will say shall not require two minutes. Come stand by this window; it is cooler. And no one must hear me," he added, looking anxiously about the room.

"Men are fools!" said Frau von Ockel, laughing. "People do not frequent a room like this at one of the palace balls."

They stood by the window. It was a low, French window, and heavily curtained. It opened upon a low balcony.

There Constantine Wolzonn told his story, so guarded that none but himself should be known by name and criminated.

"I could not help speaking to her as I did," said he, "for I knew well she was unhappy, and with the very best of reasons, too. Eleven years ago her husband met at Arantha, in Poland, a beautiful peasant girl. Beautiful, lady, beyond description is Kathi Chichkini. No wonder he loved her; one could hardly help it. He even went twice in one summer to Poland to see her. She is now the mother of a child. It made me very angry, for the lady of whom I speak I loved even as a little girl, when I ran and caught her butterflies and picked her flowers. I have always loved her since, not as one loved to marry, but as one loves to care for and protect. Until yesterday,

we have lived our lives-long on terms of the warmest friendship. Now I am going away from Russia forever; I shall start at daylight to-morrow. Do not look surprised and ask me why? I seem a worthless outlaw at the best. I am going no one knows where or how; going to live, if live I can, an honest, honorable life. But I cannot bear to go, leaving such a parting to cling like a nightmare about me forever. I hoped I might see her here, just see her, and carry that picture to wipe away those last bitter words — oh, they were bitter indeed! — that she said to me."

"And did you indeed suppose that a lady would cheerily accept a sympathy offered because her husband loved a pretty peasant girl? By my faith, General Wolzonn, you have been a bachelor too long! There's many such a skeleton in the mansions of nobility, but few are the noble ladies who like to have the bones rattled even by their dearest friends."

"But why could not I have thought of that before?" asked the officer, as the nature of things began to appear to him.

"This world is very odd, monsieur," Frau von Ockel continued, smiling an answer to his question; "and the more we try to arrange it to please ourselves, the more it displeases us. There is never a '*must*' said in this world, but there's a 'will not' springs up to answer it. I am sorry, very sorry that you are going away. Of course I will not ask you why, but I do not at all believe that it will be forever. A Russian cannot long live out of Russia. He would rather, I believe, be exiled to Siberia, so he might be sure he was still in Russia."

The officer winced. He thought not, but the lady continued: "I've just a little suggestion for you that many a man has found to his advantage. Since you cannot have things as you want them, why not take things as they are, and make the best of them? And as for this queer little romance you have got into, why not wait till you are well out of Russia, and write to the lady? Tell her you did not mean to shake the skeleton, but tell her carefully, and see if she will not be good-hearted and common sense enough to forgive you, and herself wipe out the nightmare."

"My dear Lady von Ockel, a lifelong thank you!" exclaimed General Wolzonn, kissing her hand, and they left the room together. Frau von Ockel had dropped her fan by the window. It was the only trace they left behind.

The two shadows of the comforter and comforted had hardly left the room, to be lost in the gay company beyond, when another shadow appeared in the long window. The figure came through the curtains and stood alone in the little room, silent for a moment.

She picked up the fan that lay at her feet, and turned it slowly over, examining it with apparent interest. It was of exquisite workmanship, wrought by the Chinese from the shell of the sea-turtle. Then turning, calmly as one might, she hung it on the knob of the window. Who would have thought that a terrific storm was shaking the very foundation of her nature!

She pressed her forehead between her hands a moment, then stood erect again, as though ashamed of it.

As her hands fell, her eyes were fastened upon a

heavy ring on one finger. It bore the crest of Meerschaum, set in diamonds. It was the wedding-gift of the Prince Reppoun, and had not left that finger since he placed it there. Madly she tore it off. It cut the flesh as it came, leaving a stain of blood upon the gold band. It flashed in the dim light. She looked at it a moment, then threw it fiercely out of the window.

"So go away from me!" she cried. "Throw me away from you, Prince Victor von Meerschaum! You! man whose footprints I have laved in love! An hour ago I could have walked these streets ragged and barefooted by your side. This moment I would not sit upon a throne and be your wife. My husband? Yes, my husband! Devil! Fiend!"

Constantine Wolzonn stood before her. As much surprised as she, he stammered, "Lady princess, pardon me! I did not mean to interrupt you. Lady von Ockel dropped her fan in here, and I came in search of it."

He turned to go. She called him back. "Here is the fan," she said, handing it to him. He took it, but she still held it. Involuntarily his eyes met hers. They were piercing and black in the dim light. They seemed on fire with some hidden passion beneath them. The lady continued:

"It was an hour ago you interrupted me, when I was watching the cold stars out on this balcony."

Her hand dropped from the fan. The soldier started.

"What! You did not hear?"

"I heard that you were going away from Russia. Tell me, before you go, will you forgive me what I said to you yesterday?"

"I forgive you? Lady princess, what do you mean? But you did not hear all?"

"The balcony is small; I did not try to help it. General Wolzonn, you have shaken a skeleton before me, the presence of which I had not so much as dreamed of before."

"God forgive me, lady!"

"Nay, rather be thanked! Monsieur, I trust you."

"Then God be thanked! For your confidence I would forfeit life."

"Shall I believe it? Will you prove it true?"

"Heaven witness, lady! Here I swear I will."

"Then take me with you where you are going! Take me away from the horrible blackness that awaits me at Meerschaum. Oh, Constantine Wolzonn, be my friend, as you have sworn it."

"Mercy! mercy! Heaven help me!" groaned the officer while she spoke. The dream of his life, the sun of his heaven, was within his grasp the moment he had banished it forever.

"What means that sigh?" exclaimed the princess. "Does my friend hesitate in the hour when he can save me?"

"Lady princess," groaned the officer, "whom God hath joined—"

"God joined?" she cried. "I did it—I, and the bishop, and Father Charlovitz; and God, who did *not* do it, punishes me."

"Then dare you fly? Nay, lady, let me help you bear it where you are, and better the blackness at Meerschaum if we can."

"Duplicit knave!" exclaimed the princess, starting back from him. "Aye, leave me in a nursery to

which hell would be preferable, then come and lave my hand for a caress."

Constantine Wolzonn, trembling from head to foot, turned to leave her.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" she cried, falling on her knees; "I did not know what I was saying. But if you love me, if you ever loved me, oh, pity me! Take me somewhere — take me anywhere! Take me with you, and kill me, and with my dying breath I will bless you for your kindness!"

The officer covered his eyes with his hand, and turned his head away. He could not see her and not yield. Love wrings the heart when it is tuned to pity.

"Nay, do not turn your eyes away," she pleaded. "Look at me, look at your cousin, look at the Princess von Meerschaum down in the dust to you. Ah! pray forget the past and carry me away."

Was it in mortal man to hold much longer? Voices sounded in the corridor, and thanking heaven for the intervention, the officer exclaimed, "Lady princess, stand up! For your name's sake, be sensible: some one is coming."

"No, I will not stand up!" she cried. "What is my name to me? Let them see me who will, and laugh at a broken wreck on the rock Meerschaum."

With strong arms he raised her to her feet.

"Lady princess," he said, "I shall leave you for a moment. Go out on the balcony and wait there till I come."

In an instant he was gone, and she was upon the balcony. The air was cold, but her cheeks burned as though her whole being were on fire. Dreary,

silent, dark, forsaken was the street, far down beneath her. Away in the distance was the echo of horses' hoofs, then all was still again. Soon the bump, bump, bump of wooden shoes sounded, and slowly there passed beneath the balcony a mean, degraded rag-picker; one of the lowest of the low of all creation, gathering their life out of the gutters of death, and even at that, lest they should gather too ample a livelihood, they are searched by police whenever they meet them, and everything of value is taken to fill the guardman's purse.

Under the window he stopped. His forlorn, old body almost lost its equilibrium. He shaded his eyes with his hand, for he stood in the faint light shed from the windows of the palace. Twice, three times he tried, before he raised something from between the paving-stones, on the point of his iron hook. He stood for a moment, turning it over and over, and from one hand to the other, to convince himself that he held a real gold ring with flashing stones in it. Then he looked from window to window of the palace, and dropping his wooden shoes into the bag upon his back, he darted into a black by-way at a faster pace than his old legs had carried him for many years.

"You are welcome, old man," said the princess. "May it give you more pleasure than it has ever given me."

The street was silent again. The sky was cold, and a faint gray hovered in the east, tinged with the first thought of the dawning.

"The pavement is hard," she whispered. "It would be but an instant!" Her hands clasped the rail of the balcony. "Only a tiny leap, a swift breath in the

air." She pressed the rail closer. "One leap, and all would be over. Shall I? shall I?" She —

A soft, warm hand rested on hers, a soft voice sounded. "My lady, the —er— the night-air is dangerous."

Her ears were hardly tuned to the human voice, already waiting for the whir of the wind rushing past them.

"I will go in, Monsieur von Bremen," she said, with a cold shudder that made the Dane shrug his shoulders, and wonder if he had done more damage at dinner than he meant.

What was it caused her to stop, with her foot upon the sill? Ah! many a moment has blotted out a lifetime as it passed. She hesitated. A random thought had flashed across her mind. In an instant it grew to a resolve.

"Monsieur!" she said.

"My lady, '*Tout à vous. Toujours prêt.*' Yes."

"Then listen! I am going away from St. Petersburg. Will you go with me for a little way, to assist me?"

The Dane was on his knees in an instant.

"And you will be my wife?"

She motioned him to rise with an imperious gesture, and answered, "I said I was going away from St. Petersburg."

"I will go with you and be your slave," the Dane replied humbly.

"Very well then. I will send you a thousand rubles in the morning to prepare. Be at the grove, at the east end of the castle lawn, upon the highway, with

a traveling-coach, prepared for a long journey, just one hour after the next sunset gun."

Without another word she left him.

Rising to his feet, he took her place upon the balcony, and as her coach rolled from the court and passed the window, he shook his head, and, strange as it may seem, he muttered, "She is not so nearly mine as I thought this afternoon."

General Wolzonn returning, having nerved himself to urge her, force her if it lay in his power, back to her duty at Castle Foam, was surprised to find the change upon the balcony; but relieved withal, he walked away without disturbing the figure of a man that had taken her place. It was well for him that he did not disturb it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SILVER CORD IS LOOSED.

THE Dane at once began a search for Count Olendorff, who had as ever accompanied him to the palace. He was nowhere to be found. He took a public carriage and drove to the count's residence, arranging with himself a simple plan upon which the count was to proceed to carry on the work and instate himself in Meerschaum while he kept the princess away. He was anxious lest the count, being old, might not be equal to everything; yet there was no other way, as he was thus prevented from being on hand himself.

"I must leave it all with him," he said, "him and Priest Charlovitz, unless I can bring Wolzonn back into the traces again. At least, I will see the general and do what I can with him."

The sleepy houseman declared his master had been in four hours, but the count had often left such parties early as he had grown older.

A dim light shone under the door of the room where the count always sat. The Dane knocked with his hand on the latch, and entered without waiting a reply. Yes, the count must have been waiting long for him, for he had fallen asleep in his arm-chair.

The lamp burned low. The air in the room was

close. But from the darkness of the hall Von Bremen could see well enough; and as for the smell, he had smelled far worse. It did not matter. He threw himself into a chair with a sigh. The burden of scheming rested heavily upon him. He glanced toward the easy-chair. The count's chin rested on his chest; he was fast asleep.

"No harm to sleep if you are tired, my lord," he said, almost gently; "but it's time to wake up now. Business! business, my lord! Wake up!"

He rapped lightly on the table, but the count had fallen into that deep, early morning sleep that is sound even in an arm-chair.

"You usually give up your chair to me," said the Dane; "but never mind to-night. I'll soon have cushions of my own to rest upon; cushions of my own! Ha, ha!"

He struck the table a little harder, and with a fiendish smile bent over and looked up into the face of the sleeper.

"Beg pardon!" he said in a low voice, with his face very near the count's. "I did not know but you were —er—er— waking up. But you are not; no. This lamp of yours burns beastly low, and smokes! Lord! it smells strong enough to raise the dead. It gives this room a frightful, ghostly hue. Come, come, wake up! I want some fire and wine. I want to talk with you as long as it takes your old clock to bang out 'twelve,' and then be gone, for I've a hard day's work ahead of me, from this, an hour before the sun rises, to that, an hour after it sets again. Now, come, old fellow! I say, do you want to marry the — ?"

He touched the count's arm as it hung over the chair. It swung in its socket like the pendulum of his clock, wearily, slowly, when the clock quite run down. He grasped the lamp and held it nearer. Was the count ill? The little flame that had flickered and smoked in the socket gave one flash and then went out. The Dane sprang from his chair so quickly that it went banging backward on the floor. It was so dark he could not tell if the crash had roused the count. The shutters were fastened. He could not find the bolt, and tore them open, bursting it. The morning light came softly through the mists into the smoky room. He returned to Count Olendorff. Laying his hand on the old man's forehead, he lifted the head. Bent beyond its equilibrium, it fell the other way and rested on the back of his chair. With a horrible, guttural gurgle the lower jaw fell, the mouth was opened wide, and two eyes fixed in a blind stare were fastened directly upon Albrecht von Bremen's face. With a terrible shudder the Dane bowed the head upon the chest again, and turned toward the window, groaning from the very depths of his nature, "Lord Count Olendorff is dead!" All that to the world had represented the once great Adjutant of Russia was in that arm-chair, dead as his marble bust above the fireplace.

After standing before the window till the first shock of the discovery had worn away, he sat down by the table again, and throwing his head upon his arms, moaned:

"Lost again, just at the moment of my victory! When will this everlasting '*almost*' end in one success?" And the smoke from the lamp, as it curled

about his head, seemed forming, by some mystery of prophecy, the letters of one word in answer:

"*Never!*"

"Yes, dead!" he repeated. "Dead the first instant in the twenty years that he could have lent a helping hand to me. H'm. Now I think of it all soberly, I believe Count Olendorff is wise. I wish —" He lifted his head, and looked at the dead man. "I do, I almost wish that I sat in that arm-chair there. But stop. What am I saying? If I cannot have the whole, I'll have the half; so called the 'better half.' 'Tis better to elope with the Princess von Meerschaum than to be a corpse in an arm-chair; yes, far better."

In the natural course of things his ever hopeful heart began to lift his spirits up again. He sat erect; then, slowly at first, and soon more rapidly, he searched the room, apologizing to the arm-chair and its contents with a nod and a smile, and the words, "'Some good out of each evil.' That was your motto. I will adopt it, and see what good may come of this."

All that he found of worth and little size he put with his great-coat in the corner: a bag of gold, the heavy cross and diamonds worn by the count as insignia of his high office in his days of power, several rings and honors.

"Hope while the heart beats," he said. "And what else have I done but live on hope, eat hope and drink hope for the whole of my life, and I've not grown gouty yet. I'm much inclined to dread a failure in this venture with the princess; but I'll hope for the best, and take all I can get. I'd laid a mountain of hope on that senseless Lord Olendorff; yes;

and the mountain crushed him. My mountains always do."

Now he came upon a drawer that would not move.

"He carried the key to that in his pocket," he muttered, and began, without a shudder this time, to search the dead man's clothes.

Almost the first thing he found was a paper only half thrust into the coat-pocket. He opened it.

"Dated this morning!" he exclaimed. "The last work of — The devil!" he hissed. "What do I read! 'Withdraw all disposal of my property to Albrecht von Bremen, giving it without reserve to Kathi Chichkini, a peasant living near Arantha, in Poland, who was stolen from her parents in St. Petersburg by a fraud to which I was a party.' *Villain!* and how in heaven did he know where she lived? 'Some good out of each evil.' Yes, you were very right, old man. Lucky for me you died just when you did."

He bent over and looked up into the count's eyes. "Did your conscience prick you at the ball last night, that you came home so early and made that out? Or was it the grapple of Death that you did not understand? If you had lived till noon to-day, that will would have been on record, I suppose, and I blocked. But the will must go for the deed at the Judgment-day, for the deed will be nowhere soon."

He set the paper on fire, and with a smile watched it burn away till the last spark had meandered over the black ash-heap, and all was gone. Then dashing the ashes into a thousand flakes, he added: "I have destroyed the evidence that would have branded on your coffin-lid that comfortable word, 'a knave!'

And now, farewell, Count Olendorff. Farewell, my patron Olendorff. I cannot help you, I cannot harm you any more. I look at your face, that—er—that old, familiar face, for the last time now; for I am going away from you, my lord, and you are going away from me. We've little more in common, unless your theory of a Judgment-day be true. If so, then bear you your witness against me that I was the serpent that tempted you, and step up into Paradise from my shoulders. But if Pythagoras may chance to be right, and in a comfortable metempsychosis we wander no further than the birds and butterflies, then hold! transmigrate you with care; for in that paper I have burned you did belie a friend, my lord; and when I overtake you, I shall collect it as a debt, with ample usury."

He secreted the stolen treasures about his clothes and in the pockets of his overcoat; then turning, with his hand upon the latch, he added: "And now, until our paths do come again together, farewell, Count Olendorff."

Step by step his footfalls echoed on the stairs; and as the houseman held open a carriage-door for him he dropped a coin into his hand, saying: "My poor old man, our good master is dead. He died of—er—of—er—yes, his heart ceased beating about daylight this morning. Do not go into the room until the priest comes. I will send one directly." He gave him the key.

The old man looked first at the speaker, then at the coachman, then at the house, then at the ruble, then at the key of his master's room, which the Dane had given him.

"As you say it shall be done," he answered; and closing the carriage-door, entered the house in a half dream, repeating, "Dead, dead, dead! Died because his heart stopped beating at daylight? He never died that way before, since these many years I've served him as his honored houseman, yet the daylight has come every morning, as I remember, unless it was a storm, or the like;" and despite the Dane's command and his promise, he went directly to the dead man's room.

Indeed the Dane had given the command simply to remind him that he had better go up, in order that he might have some one to charge the theft of the jewels upon in case it was discovered.

All day long Albrecht von Bremen hurried from high to low and back to high again; as much at home with one as with the other; as familiar and friendly when he wrangled with some petty pawn jeweler over the value of a stone, rudely torn from its setting, or the price of the setting with the gems all taken out,—for he was too thoughtful of the future to sell them together,—as when, with quiet bow, he crossed himself before the church authorities and planned for the burial of a great man whose silver cord was loosed. Then he dropped in upon the priest. Whoever the next in line might be, the Dane did not care; he had a thumb-screw that would apply equally well to any one who might present himself. His plans must all center in the priest now, to turn the prince out, and even leave the place vacant if need be, till he could secure the princess and Kramareff, and then return to do the rest.

He trembled to place so much in the hands of one whose constancy was so little to be relied upon; but nothing better could be done, since he had found himself baffled, as we know, in a search for General Wolzonn. His nerves were well-nigh exhausted. He dreaded the interview.

After ten minutes' talk, however, with the priest he became convinced that something had influenced him strongly in his favor. What it was he did not ask; he did not even stop to wonder. He gave him the connected chain of evidence and the address of the actress who was to clinch the nail, better satisfied that the work would be done.

In a sense his conclusion was correct, for the priest had all day followed a line of thought very like that which had passed through his mind just before the Dane entered.

"What a change has come over me!" Father Charlovitz had said to himself. "I cannot understand myself. Has the evil one possessed me? It cannot be; yet something drives me beyond withstanding. For the dignity of the church I may not be thus bent and beaten without resentment. Forbearance would be treason to my office. A day has passed; he has offered no apology. As Heinrich Charlovitz lives, that man shall suffer!"

Albrecht von Bremen found the priest looking somewhat browbeaten, with a very black shadow about one eye. The priest explained that he had tripped on a protruding root and struck his head against a branch of Meerschaum; and the Dane replied:

"Protruding branches, and roots not growing in

the ground where they belong, are—er—yes, sadly out of place."

But to Albrecht von Bremen he had said: "He never struck that head of his against a branch, unless there is some spiritual rendering there; nor do roots trip up a man walking so slowly as a priest. It strikes me the prince may have returned,—a very potent branch of Meerschaum he!—and been up to some of his father's tricks. Many a black eye floated round the castle in those days, from which affliction priests were not exempt, if they trod upon the old man's toes."

"Has Father Charlovitz thought of our conversation?" he asked.

"I see a certain justice in Monsieur von Bremen's claim if the princess be not injured by it," he replied.

"Very good," said the Dane. "One hour after sunset to-night she will leave Castle Foam forever, of her own free will, in princely state, to claim her own as the Countess von Kramareff, after making a short journey, during which time you are expected to have completed the work and be ready for the reward which is waiting for you."

The priest bowed his assent without an answer, and the Dane left him.

As Heinrich Charlovitz stood in his little study-door watching the carriage drive away, a boy stopped and crossed himself.

"Good father!"

"Well, my son, what is it?"

"How many times must I forgive a boy?" he asked.

"Till seventy times seven, my son."

"That will be very hard, for he struck my little sis-

ter twice, and threw mud at her, and he says he will do it again; and I would like to pound him if it would not be wrong."

The priest held up a crucifix, and pointing to a painting of the Lord in agony upon it, said:

"When He was reviled and spit upon, my son, for your sake and mine He reviled not again."

"Nor will I, good father," said the boy. But as he walked slowly away he mused: "It almost seems as though I ought to pound him. I wonder if the Lord Jesus had had a little sister, and if a boy threw mud at her and struck her, what he would have done. I wish he had struck me. It wouldn't matter half so much. Oh, I am very wicked! I want to pound him. Shall I ever be as good as that holy priest? I suppose he could forgive anything."

Why was it that none of the shadow of the cross, with its seventy times seven, fell over the priest as he held it up?

To the owners of names here below there are surely two values, an estimated and an actual.

CHAPTER IX.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

IT was almost time for the sunset gun. Elise knew that her mistress was going somewhere upon a journey. She knew it was for no good, for the cards had all told wrong; she knew that she was to accompany her, and she did not want to go; hence, hearing that the prince had returned, — she had been a prisoner in the princess's apartments all day to keep her tongue from doing mischief, — she hurried back with the news, from an errand upon which she had been sent across the hall. Her mistress turned suddenly white, white as marble; then, rising in a determined way, went out and locked the door behind her. Elise was still a prisoner, and it did not please her over-much.

The prince was in his library. The princess rapped, but receiving no answer, frowned, opened the door, and entered, closing it behind her. That moment she wished she had not come, but was too proud to fly.

The prince crouched on an ottoman by the distant window, his arms wound painfully over the pedestal of Vishnu, still clad in a thick fur coat and high-topped boots, his hair tangled over his head, his face buried in his arms. Had he gone mad? Would he

tear her in pieces there, in the house where he married her, to make room for that peasant of Arantha and her child?

"My lord!" she said timidly.

He did not move.

"My lord!" she said again, beginning to tremble violently, "it was not told me till this instant that you were in the house. Are you ill?"

Very slowly he lifted his head. His eyes were bloodshot. His face was haggard.

"And what is that to you, madame, whether I be or not?" he asked in a harsh bitter voice.

Startled beyond all considerations of what she said, the princess exclaimed, "Nothing! nothing, my lord!"

"Aye, *nothing!* I thought so. And how of that devil's dog, Bremen of Denmark! — is *he* ill, that he is not now in your embrace?"

"Who?" gasped the princess, coming to her senses.

"Oh, no one! no one, your ladyship! Only an imaginary character."

The blood of bold Kramareff rushed through the veins of the princess.

"Your Highness," she exclaimed, "fares it ill between you and Kathi Chichkini of Arantha, in Poland, that she is not still resting in your arms?"

"Who?" ejaculated the prince, springing to his feet.

"Oh, no one! no one, your lordship! I was simply imagining a character."

"So you have found me out?" the prince said, throwing himself again upon the ottoman.

"You seem to think you have found me out."

This suddenly recalled the Dane again, and, looking up, the prince replied:

"Woman, this thing is preposterous!"

"Aye, my lord, it *is* preposterous."

"What mean such words to me? they are insulting!"

"They are your words to me, my lord, and they *are* insulting."

Stamping the floor in his rage, the prince replied, "Madame, did you ever see me lavishing on another favors and love I never paid to you? — kinder words! softer smiles! damned kisses! like a frantic — "

"Enough! I have not seen it, but I know that you have seen yourself doing just that thing; you — "

"Stop, stop! madame! I will hear no more. This thing must end," said the prince, standing once more before her. Stung to the quick, and shamed by the vivid picture of himself, which he had intended to be of her, he had said, "This thing must end." He knew of but one ending. He was ready to kneel and ask her pardon, — to be forgiven and as freely to forgive.

The princess was on fire with rage. She had been thus denounced, coupled with shame, by a man who had just left the side of an unlawful love. She knew of but one ending, the one she had planned for herself. With a tone heavy-laden with scorn, she replied: "Let it end, Prince von Meerschaum, and the sooner so much the better. In one hour, unless by force you prevent me, I shall leave you and your castle forever."

The prince staggered back to the ottoman. Instantly the heart that would have melted was frozen

hard again. Burying his face in one hand on the pedestal, he extended the other, saying, "Leave me, Lady von Kramareff! Go when you will! go where you will! Or stay you here, and I will go."

"Be pleased to remain, Prince von Meerschaum. I choose to go. Farewell!"

The door closed. The princess was gone. The prince raised his hands above his head. "Aye! I have done it at last," he groaned, "and the world is not large enough to contain my misery. One lost, the other gone. Both the worse for me, and I the worse for both of them. But hold!" he exclaimed, springing toward the door. "I will stop her! she shall not go!" He stood still for a moment, then shook his head. "No, no! Let her go! She has only played a farce with me. She goes because she wishes to. She goes with Albrecht von Bremen and because she loves him. Let her go!"

"Merciful God!" he prayed, "grant me respite! Oh, grant me respite! Take my wealth, O God! take everything. Give me but one hour of peace of mind. Grant me expiation, absolution, rest from this misery. My punishment has been enough! Take it away! Take everything with it, so that it leaves me my own old self again."

He staggered weakly on his feet, and pressed his forehead with his hands.

"Oh, I am faint! I am famished! Since six-and-thirty hours ago and more I have tasted neither food nor sleep, and I was well-nigh worn out then. Can I, in such a state, wield sober judgment? Do I know what I am doing? Do I know what I have done? Hold! Stay these fearful apparitions! The

room grows dark around me. *Wait! I have acted blind. I have been misunderstood!* Hold! hold, I say, till I can act again!"

He fell heavily upon the floor, his face downward, and lay motionless, while the prayer he had prayed, carried up to that far throne where prayers are heard, was cast into the "mill of the gods," and, as it passed between the upper and the nether stones, an answering destiny was ground; "slowly," as those mills grind always, but ground "exceeding small."

There were strange suspicions and unaccountable tremblings in the servants' hall that night.

"Why are we shut in here, and not one of us allowed in the castle?" asked one.

A shadow passed a window where several were looking out. A door was quickly opened, and some one called "Leo! is that you?" But the shadow made no answer, and disappeared.

Later, two servants, headed by the butler, emerged from the door.

"We must find Leo first," said he, "and know if we are still to keep out of the castle. Look! it is black from tower to door."

"There's something wrong abroad," said one.

"I'm jumping from every bush as from the devil," said another.

"Hark! Did ye hear a cry? Or are my wits gone to fear?"

The butler turned about. His face was white in the moonlight; it was always red with wine.

"And did ye too hear the cry, or was it the scream of an owl?" asked the servant.

The butler touched his wine-tipped nose and an-

swered, "I heard it. This is not a common night. I tell ye, men, it was not an owl's voice, and ye are right to fear. We will go back to the castle and send for the priest. I am not afraid, but I will go with ye to guard ye, for who should know better and disregard the warning of such a cry as that? 'Twas the cry of a dying soul we heard."

And the butler was nearer right than he thought for.

CHAPTER X.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

THROUGH sleet and snow and thaw, a Parisian winter's day, a brisk little man wound his way down the Rue de Rivoli, from the police headquarters. He stopped at the Rue Castiglione, consulted a paper, then consulted a gendarme; then raised his umbrella — he had been walking under the arcade before — and started down the street, at the end of which rose the Column Vendôme. He had no time to walk around the square that surrounded it, though the crossing through the center had not been cleared, and ran a step or two, sooner than wait for a lagging horse to pass him. He stopped for an instant to kick the snow from his boots against the iron railing that surrounded the great bronze tower circled in a spiral with bas-reliefs of Napoleon's conquests in Russia, and wrought from Russian arms, — erected by the exiled emperor in 1806, to displace an equestrian statue of Louis XIV.

The man shuddered as he looked at it, for he was a Russian, and hurried on to the Rue Neuve St. Augustin. There he began counting the numbers, and presently entered a dismal court through a dingy brownstone front, looking down a narrow alley, that afterward, under the magic finger of Louis

Napoleon, grew to the grand avenue leading to his royal opera-house.

As an old woman came to the door, two gray bullet-eyes were fastened upon her in a way that said, "Be careful and tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Is there a Monsieur Rubens living here?" he asked.

"Roubeens? Roubeens? No, monsieur. None of that name here."

"Rubens! Rubens!" explained the little man.

But still the old woman shook her head. "There's no such man as Roubeens here, unless it be an old man on the sixth floor, just moved in, upward of seventy-five, I think, for I am seventy-three, and he told me he was the better of us two, and I know his name is not Roubeens."

The stranger heard her through. It is impossible to turn the drift of such an one's conversation. They always come back to the point with the clearest heads if let alone. He dropped a five-franc piece into the woman's ready palm, and said, "This Rubens is a young man; been here about two months; gives fencing-lessons, you know."

"Ah, monsieur, there is one Felix, on the third floor, does that, and teaches children in some other things than fencing. Third floor, monsieur. My legs are pretty stiff with age, or I'd go up before you," she added, looking at the five-franc piece.

A tall, pale man opened the door on the third floor. He was thin, much like one wasting in consumption; his long hair was combed directly back from his forehead. His face was smooth-shaven. Green specta-

cles covered his eyes. He was wrapped in a long, flowered dressing-gown and slippers.

"This is Monsieur Rubens," the little man said, as though he were giving a piece of information. And he looked at the tall man in a way that made him shrink back into a shadow as he replied, "Yes — or no; Monsieur Rubens has left. I am Felix, at your service."

"I am sorry. I wanted to see Monsieur Rubens," said the little man, never taking his eyes off the tall fencing-master, which was evidently making him very uncomfortable.

"Monsieur Rubens left before I came to this house," said he; "but I will find his address for you. Do you wish to send some word to him?"

The little man took his eyes off at last, much to the relief of the fencing-master, and smiling in an incomprehensible way, replied, "Perhaps Monsieur Felix will do as well."

"If I may be of service, command me."

"Good! By that authority I command you to go back with me to Petersburg."

The fencing-master sprang fairly off his feet, and when he came down again was several shades whiter than before.

"I cannot," he gasped. "It is impossible!"

"Really?" said the little man. "I thought I was to command you."

"I tell you I am not Monsieur Felix — Rubens, I mean. I — "

"You are confused, monsieur. Call it the good old Wolzonn; 'tis better than either."

The little man was right.

"Found out! Curse the luck of it!" groaned Constantine Wolzonn, sinking into a chair.

"And while you are about it," added the little man, "curse the very devil of a hunt I have had for you all over Europe in mid-winter." He removed his wig and false beard, disclosing one of the hunting-party by the Round Lake, an intimate friend of both Wolzonn and Reppoun; and extending his hand, added, "The game is up, and I have won. Now let's shake hands and talk it over."

But the fencing-master sullenly refused.

"By what right do you come here?" he asked.

"Bless my soul! Are you angry? Then I will wait, explain my authority, and trust for a shake of the hand afterward. I come by order of the Tzar. In fact, from his own purse he pays my expenses, and offers me an honor if I come back successful. He wants to see you."

"I thought so," groaned the fencing-master. "Do you happen to know what he wants of me?"

"He wants you to release the prince, who for three months now has been lying in a horrible dungeon, under charge of committing the murder."

"*The murder!* Yes," said Constantine Wolzonn. Then the man that was in him, covered so far from the light by his years of crime, trembling, and torture, roused itself, and he rose firmly to his feet, saying, "Better the right man should suffer than the wrong. Count, here is my hand. I will go back with you to Russia." And the count grasped the hand of one who at that moment, for the first time in his life, actually became a man.

Constantine Wolzonn was free in Paris. There

was no friendship between the Tzar and France that would not rather invite him to remain than go, if the Tzar wanted him. He plainly saw the result of the step he so calmly resolved to take — the rest of his life in the horrible dearth of frozen Siberia. It was an enormous sacrifice, after all he had sacrificed his life through to prevent it, yet he made it cheerfully. More than once in the past three months he had seriously thought of going back, giving himself up, and taking the consequences. When the pinch came he had for the moment rebelled; but when, on second thought, he said, "I will go back with you," he turned the leaf that had stuck so long, and found a clean page before him, — the old man and his record wiped away, and a new life before him, ready for him to make what he could of it.

They sat down; neither spoke for a moment. The count was satisfied that his work was done at last — a work which, as will appear, was not for the Tzar, nor yet that his expenses were paid by the crown, nor yet for the promised honor that he had been induced to undertake. He was a member of the Royal Council. The fencing-master was more than satisfied to be silent, contemplating with a thrill of joy the great turn in the tide of life that was to make of him a degraded exile, forced to work with might and main for a meager livelihood. At last it occurred to him to ask:

"Who is this prince arrested for the murder?"

"The Prince von Meerschaum, of course."

"The Prince von Meerschaum! He was a baby! Why, man, what murder do you mean?"

"What murder? General Wolzonn, have you become an idiot? The murder of the princess."

"Not the Princess von Meerschaum?"

"Yes, the Princess von Meerschaum. Have you not heard from Russia since you left? The press of the world has been full of it."

"Oh, Heaven!" groaned the fencing-master. "I had rather be taken back to Russia for — something else!"

"Then it seems I must begin and tell you all. The prince was suspected from the outset; gave himself up in a strange sort of bravado, and has lain ever since in a dungeon as horrible as could be found. The Tzar gave the matter to the Council, but would not sign the verdict they brought in because the warrant was not accompanied by every signature. The prince, you know, is a bosom-friend of the Tzar, and on inquiry his Royal Highness learned that several in the Council believed that in some strange way the man was innocent. You almost got your own foot into a warm spot there, for your sudden, mysterious, and unaccountable departure led many to say, 'General Wolzonn had a hand in it.' But the prince himself swore for you that if his wife had a true friend in the world it was General Wolzonn, and sadly injured his own cause by saying to the Tzar, before the Council, 'Your Majesty, if it lie between General Wolzonn and myself, in common sense let the condemnation rest on me.' Fortunately it was found that you left by ship the morning before the night that the deed was done; that settled it. But still the Tzar would not sign. I offered to find you, knowing that you were the nearest relative of the princess and intimate,

hoping that you might throw light upon the matter that would save the prince."

"My dear count," said Constantine Wolzonn, "you have said too much. I promised unguardedly to go with you. From sheer blind madness, I should have gone back with you, and said to the Tzar before the Council, 'Your Majesty, I think he did it.' Look at the burning coals of fire that man has heaped upon my head! I know absolutely nothing. I should have had no reason; I should simply, ignorantly have believed he did it, and have said so, knowing that it would have caused his condemnation."

"Then I have had my labor for my pains, General Wolzonn. Were the evidences doubled and trebled what they are, — were the prince himself to swear 'I did it,' — I would still believe, aye, *know*, that man was innocent."

"What are the evidences?" asked the fencing-master.

"Briefly these: It was on the night after the day you sailed. For some strange reason, Leo, my lady's private valet, in her name ordered the butler to keep the servants all in their quarters till he came and called them; it was just after sundown. Ten o'clock came, and he had not returned. Some of them stole out. The castle was black; not a light in the building. They heard strange noises. They became frightened, and sent down to the village for the priest. He at once dispatched messengers for an officer of the police. The castle-grounds were searched, when no one was found in the castle, and Leo was found stabbed and dying in a clump of trees at the lower corner of the lawn upon the highway. As he died

he gasped a dozen times, 'He did it! he did it! He has taken her away, and he will kill her too!' Then they searched the castle more carefully. Her ladyship's room was a mass of disorder. No one could doubt that it had been the scene of a struggle. To my mind, that is the least of evidence against the prince; for had it been a strong man instead of a woman, he could have done what he chose with him without a struggle. There were blood-stains on the floor and bed-curtains. The prince was found lying on his face upon the floor. There were blood-stains on the door, on his hands, and even his dagger — a terrible evidence, I confess — was wet with blood. He may have killed Leo under some provocation. He wore a heavy fur pelisse, and high boots which were besmeared with mud. They thought he slept; but when the room was well filled, he sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'She has gone. I know it well. You need not come howling it in my ears. Get you away to your beds. It is useless to look for her. You will not see her any more.' And because the man nearest him did not obey, almost before he had ceased speaking he took him in one hand, and, as I live, hurled him through the open door, twenty feet away, before he touched the floor. The next day the princess's marriage-ring was found in possession of a rag-picker, and that, too, was stained with blood."

"Such evidence, I should think, would surely convict a man," said Constantine Wolzonn bitterly, for the thought of such scenes as must have shut earth from the eyes of his cousin roused anew the anger of his life against the Prince Reppoun, notwithstanding that man's magnanimity.

"Then you will not go back?" the count asked, though sadly, for being a warm friend of Prince Reppoun, he had hoped for his salvation through General Wolzonn.

"Not till after this matter is settled, no. But then I will go, and present myself to the Tzar and Council, for I too am in need of punishment. I too am a murderer, I am an abductor, I am a harborer of deserters from the Russian army. I! who have lived for thirty years upon the government. You stare, my dear count. You think I am lacking here." He tapped his forehead. "I confess I wonder I am not, after what I have been through; but that is precisely what I am going to say to the Tzar, and personally ask for my punishment."

"Do you know what the punishment would be?"

"Siberia for any one of the three."

"Upon my soul, I believe you are a little lacking, General Wolzonn. Why, such a man would be a very devil; you are looked upon throughout the army as a saint, and you know the Tzar thinks so. How did you commit all these crimes? Come, tell me as a friend. I swear my lips together." He made the sign of the cross.

"I will bind no man by the simplest promise, friend. I have suffered too much myself by being bound. But I will clinch my resolution to go before the Tzar by making now a clean confession. First, this vile right hand of mine killed the Count von Kramareff."

"Some two-and-thirty years ago?" asked the count.

"Yes."

"And what of it?" he asked again.

"What of it! Why, man, I am a murderer!"

"A murderer, and looking toward Siberia?"

"Looking toward Siberia."

"And is it beyond your comprehension that every nobleman of age in Petersburg, who knows that you killed Count Kramareff, knows that you killed a traitor to the crown, the very night he was plotting the assassination of the Royal Adjutant, and that it is recorded in the council records that for that deed you were made a major? Can a man be sent to Siberia for that?"

Constantine Wolzonn stared at him with open mouth and eyes. At last he began mechanically with his second crime.

"But I stole a child; I was forced to it. I know not to this day who or what she was. I was directed to go to a ship that was coming to the wharf. I obeyed one whom I considered my master. A very lying fiend! The captain gave me a child, wrapped in a basket. I started with her from St. Petersburg by post. I met a man who had deserted General Kramareff's brigade. I told him to take the child and care for her, and that for it I would support her, start him in business, and let him go free from punishment."

"You stole a child?"

"I did."

"And for that are looking toward Siberia?"

"I am."

"How do you know you stole her?"

"I took her."

"The captain gave her to you?"

"He did."

"Did any one miss her? Was any search made for her that you endeavored to conceal?"

"I do not so much as know who she was or from whom she came."

"And yet you stole her? That is absurd! Can a man be sent to Siberia for stealing a child, when the child is given to him, and he is asked to care for her? The patrons of our orphan asylum must be bitter knaves."

"But the deserter!" said Constantine Wolzonn, with a look of bewildered wonder, like a child before a conjurer.

"Perhaps your supporting him was criminal, perhaps it was not. You did not aid him to escape. You did not help him hide himself, or try to conceal him. You failed to report him to be sure, but how long ago was it?"

"Twenty-seven years ago. The girl was nearly three years old, a tiny little thing."

"Twenty-seven years ago you failed to report a deserter. Why, man! but seven years ago your name was lauded all over Russia as the right hand that lifted Nicholas to his throne. For it he made you a general. Could a failure, as a boy, to report a deserter be raked up from twenty years before that time to drive you to Siberia?"

Constantine Wolzonn was nonplused. Faintly he murmured, "What a fool I have been!"

"Just so, General Wolzonn," said the count, "you have been a very fool! And many a man is by his conscience made a fool, because against his conscience he has made himself a knave."

Constantine Wolzonn was in no mood to be made

angry by such plain, friendly talk. It was too true. He knew it, and confessed it. It mattered little for his conscience' sake whether the deeds he had done, clearly believing them to be crimes against God and man, were punishable in the courts below, they surely were above. Nevertheless he was much relieved, for while his resolution for a better life remained the same, a resolution made many times before in words, but never with the true will till he had said, "I will go back with you to Russia," he would now be able to put into effect under a much more favorable sun.

Long and earnestly the two friends conversed together over the sad horror of Castle Foam, and not without bitter shudders, clutchings of his fists, and grindings of his teeth, did the fencing-master revert to the prince, who, dungeoned in the snow-bound Russian capital, had need of anything but bitter thoughts of vengeance.

The Emperor's Prison is a bad enough place to-day; it was an infinitely worse place then. Lake Liman's Chillon, Paris's Conciergerie, Constantinople's Gate of Hell, and Venice's over the Bridge of Sighs from the Ducal Palace, were all combined in it.

Five-and-twenty feet under the ground-level a dungeon floor of solid stone was laid. Far upon the arched roof a narrow slit in the rock was made to admit a finger-breadth of light and air; but even that was so shielded to prevent communication from the outside, that high noon was dim twilight, and the longest day not over four or five hours at the most. This was the strongest and deepest dungeon of the prison, and over it that blood-chilling motto was inscribed: "*Lasciate ogni speranga, voi ch' entrate.*"

Even this was not enough to enforce the will of the law upon criminals, and in the center of the room, to a heavy block sunk in the floor, an iron ring was welded; to this, by unusually heavy chains upon his wrists and ankles, the Prince von Meerschaum was bound. The Tzar was indeed his friend, and declared that the man should not be punished while there was a doubt that might save him. Beyond this, however, he could not go, for a sovereign is, after all, but the slave of his subjects, and the charge of the prisoner had to be left entirely in the hands of the jailer. The prince and the jailer did not agree well together; the prince had struck him in the face, before the soldiers, and for that insolence was given the dungeon he now occupied.

Hurled from the pride of his high throne to such a low stone footstool, it may be imagined that the prince was not an amiable guest, nor easily pleased with the familiarities of the jailer.

At the time when Constantine Wolzonn and his friend were speaking of him he was sitting on the low stone hassock, his head buried in his hands, upon his knees, saying to himself, as many times before:

"What is it, what is it all about? Three months I have sat here and have not yet found out. Did I do it? Did jealousy madden me? Did I do it in my sleep? It is impossible! Did she not tell me she was going? Did she mean she was going to die, and did I help her? Was I drugged with fury? O God in heaven, wipe out this mystery! Why could I not have murdered that despicable Dane instead?" He shuddered, and the chains rattled on his arms. "How the chains clank and clatter, like the cables of a

ship!" he muttered. "How the lizards run from the echo as it climbs up, up, up on one side, and then comes down on the other! I wish I knew whether I were a murderer! *Murderer!* There goes the echo, and the lizards run from it!"

He wrote upon the floor with his finger, pronouncing the letters as he made them: "MURDERER. That is not a long word; no. Not many a prince's tomb has borne so short an epitaph. My chair in the council-chamber stands vacant. I see it when the jailer with a company of soldiers takes me up. My boy Victor will sit there by and-by, in that happy day when he is independent and a prince. Poor boy! He's son of a murderer now, not son of a prince!"

It was so still in the dungeon that the lizards ventured even to run across the floor. They started a little when heavy sobs jarred the chains, and perhaps they looked and wondered at tears that fell fast from eyes that, from the first fair pictures of earliest boyhood, had not known what it was to cry.

"Yes," he sighed at last, "I suppose I am a murderer. I confessed it to the Council yesterday, to settle the matter in some way, and I have seen my last of life and Russia. Farewell! farewell! The blunder of an hour wipes out in eleven years of misery a life of joy and then wipes out the blunderer. A whiff of dust caught up by a passing gust, dropped in an instant and forever, the only record I can leave behind me is the record of a murderer. Ten years ago, —

> "'A still, small voice said unto me,
> Life is so full of misery,
> Were it not better not to be?'

I wish I had listened. I wish I had listened to honor first down by Arantha. I wish I had listened to justice afterward, and loved my wife. Who under heaven deserves a punishment more than I? And what have I done in all my life that I should ask for absolution?" The jailer's key sounded without, turning the bolts. "There comes the jailer!" he said with a hard, metallic laugh, "comes with his armed soldiers to take me chained before the Council! What fearful cowards mortals are!"

The door opened wide enough for Heinrich Charlovitz to enter, then closed again. The priest seated himself close in the corner by the door, upon a narrow stone bench that surrounded the cell. The prisoner's head still rested in his hands. Father Charlovitz shuddered. It was the first time he had visited the prince. He looked suspiciously at the chains that bound him. He examined every link that he could see, as if fearful of a flaw somewhere in their manufacture. Why should he, of all men, fear a flaw, he, the friend of Prince Reppoun?

Timidly he asked, "May I speak with my lord, the prince?"

Victor Reppoun made no answer till he had asked again, then, without moving, he sullenly replied, "So you have not much to say, speak on."

"Then I will speak," said Father Charlovitz, "for I have not much to say. I will only tell the prince a dream that I have dreamed of an honest man, a faithful servant of his lord, who, when in the act of one of the greatest sacrifices of his life to the duty he owed that lord, was caught by him, beaten like a very dog, and left for dead without assistance, or even so much

as an apology; the pride of his life broken down for doing a kindness."

The prince shuddered; the priest laughed aloud.

"I have spoken long enough. The prince becomes weary. I will say no more, except of the vengeance. Did the prince think that his wife had been murdered? No, no. He has not mourned and wept, as I have heard, like such a man, or I should have come sooner to comfort him; to tell him that she lives, that she is happy and safe in the arms of Count Albrecht von Bremen."

The prince, writhing in every nerve, slowly raised his head. The priest shrank closer into the corner, looked again at the chains and laughed.

"Yes, yes. And now for the sequel. It is very short, my lord. Those are the hands that struck a faithful priest while he was serving you as never man was served before. These are the hands that by scattering blood and confusion about the castle, by dipping your dagger in blood as you lay in a swoon upon the floor, and by several other devices, aided by Albrecht von Bremen, who doubtless killed the young soul Leo, bound on those chains. Now I am satisfied. By a little testimony, which I propose to give the Council, I shall release you. But if you are not satisfied, beware! By another word I can thrust you from Meerschaum as an illegitimate child in the princedom."

Slowly rising to his extraordinary height, the priest continued: "Yes, it was I! *I!* I! who did it. And now I hope I have not killed the prince!"

"You did it!" said the prince slowly, sitting erect. "*No!* Heinrich Charlovitz, *I am not satisfied!*"

With all the dormant fury that lay sleeping in his

iron frame, the prince sprang toward the black-robed hypocrite, and before his eyes the priest saw those heavy chains snap like glass.

"Oh, help!" he shrieked, and fell senseless on the floor, though the prince had not touched him.

Victor Reppoun stood erect, folded his arms, upon which the broken chains were idly swinging, and smiled on the prostrate form, saying scornfully, "And still they touch the ground when the Prince von Meerschaum rises."

Suddenly the name had again assumed its dignity in his ears.

The door swung open. A dozen muskets were pointed at him, and as many swords flashed in the light of the lanterns, but not one man crossed the sill.

"Come in! come in, brave men!" he said, smiling, "I will not harm you. Your jailer must give me stronger chains, if he does not wish me to frighten my visitors. These are but playthings."

He struck the broken links together, and the echo went up on one side and down on the other, but the lizards had long before disappeared.*

A voice sounded from the hall, above the hubbub, "Sir jailer, admit me to the cell!"

"But I cannot," replied the jailer. "The prisoner has burst his chains, and is meditating some great massacre."

The voice said again: "But I am bidden by the

* The chains that were severed lie to-day in the relic gallery of a Russian prison. The writer once lifted those chains in his hands, and felt of the links that were twisted and broken; and a thrill of amazement filled him, never felt before, at the realization of the strength that lay in one man's arm.

Council to read this warrant and bring them an answer."

"Then stand without," said the jailer, beside himself with excitement. "Let only the guard go in."

There was a flurry among the guard. None of them wanted to be first, many would rather have been last, but they all got in at last; and standing on a stool in the doorway, the messenger read a long document. The substance of it was, that through the leniency of the Council and the conviction of the Tzar that the prince was not guilty in spite of his confession, the punishment determined upon was as light as a punishment could be. He was simply to be exiled from Russia and deprived of his title. His estates were to be held by the crown for his son at majority. He was to receive an annual pension of ten thousand rubles from the government; but if ever found on Russian soil again, was to be treated as a common murderer. The prince never knew how much of love there was wrought into that, that saved him from Siberia. He stood with folded arms, and when the messenger had finished speaking, said:

"So I am free. Freedom, sweet freedom! And withal I am only an exile — not a murderer. Think of that, Victor, when you hold the scepter of Meerschaum. And now, Cartaphilus, thou Wandering Jew, thou who hast well learned by this, come, take my hand, and show me how to wander."

He had forgotten that he was not alone. Suddenly turning to the messenger, with a bow and a half smile, he said, "Yes, I will go. The generous offer of a yearly stipend I decline. Sooner than eat the bread of Russia's charity, let the silver cord be loosed. Bear

you this word to the Council. Tell it, I will go away from Russia, and carry it this solemn oath:"— he raised his hands reverently, while the chains swung from his wrists, —"*Never*, whatever hap may tide, will I press her soil again!"

CHAPTER XI.

HEINRICH CHARLOVITZ AND THE BOY VICTOR.

SLOWLY, very slowly, Heinrich Charlovitz opened his eyes to the daylight — sunken, expressionless eyes, over which the lids like tissue were painfully strained.

"Where am I? what am I?" he asked in a weak, hoarse whisper, instead of the strong voice he expected, and the effort caused him excruciating pain. Suddenly a hand appeared from the shadows that surrounded him; it was laid on his forehead, and a voice said, "Thank God, the worst is over, and you are better, good father. But, for mercy's sake, lie quietly, and try to sleep."

This last had been called for by an involuntary shudder and cringe, and a weak struggle, on the part of the priest. Why, he did not know; but with the hand and the voice coming out of the shadow a terrible vision had appeared, of grim stone walls, ugly giants, gnashing teeth, broken chains, and a frightful realization of some one not well satisfied. From that he had struggled.

In an hour he woke again. The mists were not so thick about the bed, and for the first time in one-and-twenty days he comprehended that he had passed from the dungeon into a long, terrible fever.

By very tedious steps he climbed up toward health again; but a heavy weight pressed hard upon him. His face and form never regained that young, strong grace; and when his black, curling hair grew again, it was loaded with silver.

What a grim pleasure we are prone to take in gloating over our miseries, only to make them more intolerable! This feeling caused Father Charlovitz to repeat many times, as he walked with his open book, that passage from Virgil, not to be found in the Book, beginning, "*Facilis descensus Averni*," and ending with "*hic labor est*," — about the descent into hell being easy, but the climbing up again being very, very hard.

How soon children learn what is expected of them! The little ones of Schaumburg, that used to leap for joy and run to meet him, now crept away behind the trees till he had passed. "He is so sober and sad," they said.

The priest's young wife, wearied out with watching, had fallen victim to the fierce northern fever, and died before the priest returned to consciousness, followed closely by their only child. The village people said, "How terribly he feels his loss!" and the women prayed and wept for him, and wondered who his next wife would be.

"For man looketh on the outward appearance."

He had regained sufficient strength to conduct the services. He entered the little church with a shudder. It was crowded. The only vacant seats were the raised chairs under the balcony at the left of the altar, where the prince and princess and Victor used to sit. All

the village had come out to celebrate the recovery of Father Charlovitz. The priest stopped by the curtain shutting off the Holy of Holies. He looked up at the vacant chairs, and muttered, "I did it." Just beyond them was a beautiful window, the gift of the princess upon her marriage-day. It was an illumination of Da Vinci's "Last Supper," from the dilapidated chapel in Milan. He who has overturned his pot of salt seemed to the priest to fix his eyes on him, and nod, and smile, as who should say, "Come on; don't hesitate. We are all here, brother." He was trembling violently. He staggered away from the Holy of Holies; he left the altar and went out into the little study in the rear and locked the door. There was no service, after all, in the church at Schaumburg, except an offering of women's tears.

That night the priest looked down on the little village from an eminence behind the castle. It nestled warmly in the valley, a black shadow in the broad field of snow. Heinrich Charlovitz looked till tears shut out the picture. He leaned against an ice-covered trunk and let the tears have their full satisfaction.

"To return good for evil," said he, "is God-like. A priest should be like his Lord; but I have not been. To return good for good is man-like; I have not been a man. To return evil for evil is beast-like; I have done more than that. To return evil for good is devil-like; I have been a devil. Lo, I who have preached to others am myself become a castaway!"

He was left alone. He felt alone; that all-alone loneliness crept over him that stings the sensitive soul sometimes, when apparently reft of friends, shunned

by strangers, and even by one's self deserted. Homesickness perhaps it is; a terrible heart-sickness, whatever else.

Heinrich Charlovitz knelt in the snow and uncovered his head, alone under the star-sprinkled blue, and clasping his hands, he prayed:

"Oh, save me! save me! Father all-powerful, if it be possible; show me my path, and I will walk in it! Show me the sacrifice, and I will so willingly make it, be it my life or my most precious Isaac, that Thou canst have mercy upon me!" A prayer that, if prayed in faith, whether to saint or Saviour, block of wood or image cut in stone, could not be left unanswered by Him unto whose throne stand open twelve different gates of pearl.

The morning was slowly breaking; a morning star of Hope seemed to rise in the heart, of the prayer that, though cold, dead and buried, had yet urged him on to wrestle all night for that blessing, on the hillside looking down over Schaumburg. A voice from heaven seemed to speak to him. He raised his eyes, and solemnly replied, "I will."

He left the village behind him and entered the castle. Victor had spent the day before there with his guardian, preparing all his little worldly goods, to leave in the morning for Italy. At sunrise the boy would start; the priest must bid him farewell with the customary blessing. Last night he could not have done it; this morning he thought he could.

It was little Victor's own will to go to Italy. General Wolzonn had returned to St. Petersburg. As his friend the count had predicted, the Tzar extended to him full pardon to cover all the past, returned his

commission, and as he was the nearest relative of the little prince, appointed him his guardian.

General Wolzonn was loath to take the position at first; and before he accepted, visited the military school where the boy had been placed four months before. The winter was far spent, the day was clear and mild, and the school *en masse* was enjoying a mock battle with snowballs and snow forts, much like any other boys in any other part of this wide world, that, after all, is very much alike in all its parts.

There had risen a dispute between Victor upon one side, and a smaller boy on the other. Shielded from observation, General Wolzonn approached and listened. "Fight it out with your fists," suggested the largest and oldest boy of the company, sitting on the top of one of the forts. "He is not so large as I," said Victor, looking up surprised at the suggestion.

"That's nothing," said the big boy. "He's older than you, and you must knock him down, or you lose your side. Fight it out with your fists."

"He is not so large as I," repeated Victor. "If that is the only way to settle it, I will give in, for all I know I'm right."

"Fight it out with your fists! Come, be quick!" shouted the boy astride the fort.

"No, I will not fight it out with my fists," said Victor, stamping the snow with his little foot, and clinching the little fists that were not ready to strike a boy smaller than himself, even for the bully of the school. "My father says that such a thing is cowardly!" he exclaimed, "*and I will not be a coward!*"

"You *are* a coward!" growled the big boy, disap-

pointed at not seeing the fight; and not satisfied with that, added, after a boy's fashion, "and your father's a murderer."

Victor's face flushed purple in an instant. He spat upon the snow — among the peasants a significance of utmost scorn. "Lick spittle! Dog of other dogs!" said he. "You are a liar!" This much he had probably heard among his father's serfs, and repeated it in his rage, knowing very little of its significance; but of what followed he meant, every word. "Come down from that pile of snow, and big as you are I'll make you wish, for saying that, I'd never come here to school."

The bully hesitated. Possibly he thought it was not worth his while. He attempted to laugh it off; but such a roar went up from among the boys at his expense, that he slid down from the fort, and at the first careless assault received the little fist fair on his nose. The blood spurted, and the boys cheered. But the bully was thoroughly enraged, and would doubtless have used the inexperienced little pugilist roughly, had not General Wolzonn determined that the affair had gone far enough, and stepped into view.

The appearance of a general's uniform sent a cold chill of awe over the boys of the military school. They all sprang into position, and saluted, all but Victor. He opened his little fists and his little arms, and ran forward with a cry of joy. As he looked up into the officer's face, his eyes were bright with tears, and two were gliding over his ruddy cheeks. His hair was cut short. How changed he was! He looked ten years older than he had six months before.

But Constantine Wolzonn was a soldier again. He

only held the boy's hand for an instant; then returning the salute of the little soldiers, said, "I want to see you," and walked away to the house, followed by Victor, to the envy of every boy in school, even the big bully, who was down behind the fort, wiping the blood from his nose with snow.

"I'll thrash him nicely for that," he said to one or two who still stood by him; but he never saw the child again.

Once shut up with the boy in his own little room, General Wolzonn extended both hands, as of old at Meerschaum, and exclaimed, "Vic., my little prince, you did that well!"

The boy's face fell. He stepped back and regarded the officer suspiciously.

"Why do you call me prince?" he said. "I would not be a prince in Russia. I would not be the Tzar and live in Russia."

His cheeks flushed, his lips quivered, his eyes shone as they had on the play-ground, and he stamped upon the floor as he would have trampled the whole Russian empire in the dust had he only been strong enough.

"Pardon me, Victor, I did not come here to vex you; I came to talk with you. I have been appointed your guardian, and I do not want to take the place unless you wish it."

"What to do?" asked the boy, doubtfully.

"To take care of you."

"I can take care of myself."

"But if you are sick?"

"I'll not be sick; and if I am, mamma will come to me. Papa would too, I can tell you, if he could."

"Aha! my dear boy, I am afraid—"

"Stop there!" exclaimed the child, as though he were a man, "I am not afraid. They have told me dreadful lies about my father, and say I am only a boy and must believe them. But I don't! I won't! I never will, and by and by I'll be a man, papa said I should, and I'll tell them what miserable cowards they have been to treat my father so."

"Then you will not go with me," said the officer.

"Perhaps I will. You were always good to me. But if I do go with you, and you tell me any lies about my father, I will kill you."

The boy's eyes flashed. He was in desperate earnest. The officer almost wished he had decided not to go.

But Victor went with him. His first choice and firm resolve, winter though it were, was to start at once for Italy, to see the paintings he had learned to love from copies in his father's collection, and to find there his father and mother. The general did not contradict this hope again, though the boy purposely expressed it many times in his hearing.

"A marvelous boy that," the guardian thought to himself at the military school, — "a marvelous boy." And many times thereafter he had occasion to repeat it, as the child braved the tedious journey. And when Florence, beautiful Florence, had been reached, he was no more the petted and petulant son of an exalted nobleman, or the indignant child of an exiled prince, but a new creature altogether, as he found himself standing on the shore of a novel and attractive element, then swimming in a luxurious flood.

He sat day after day in unapproachable silence in the great galleries; more often than anywhere else,

upon an unpopular, because uncushioned, bench in the corner of the Tribune, with Guido, Correggio, and Domenichino before him, and, dearest of all to him, Titian's lovely Venus. The most perfect conception of purity were those two lips to him; the neck, how delicate! the shadow of the chin upon it, and the light veins crossing it, how exquisite! Life lay in those lights and shadows, and his ardor knew no bounds while he was watching it. And when the gallery doors were closed, many a time he had wandered up and down the Lung Arno, and far down the Casine beyond the wall that fences in the river, and lying on the grassy bank through the Italian sunsets, he would watch the picture still, reflected in the river.

Once, when on his way home as the sun was sinking (it chanced he was without his guardian, and for that went earlier), he stopped and leaned over the stone abutment, just below the Jewelers' Bridge, to look at the picture again in the eddying river. His knife was open in his hand. Carelessly, while almost lying on the broad stone cap, he began to chip the granite with his blade. He grew excited in his work. His cheeks were aglow. He worked eagerly, and as the sun dropped down below the river he drew the knife away, and with bated breath looked at his first copy of Titian's rare Venus. Rude enough it was on the sandstone wall, but beautiful to the boy as feet upon the mountain bringing him glad tidings.

He remembered the easel in his father's library, with canvases upon it half done or just begun, and the brushes and palettes daubed with paint, just such as the artists used in Florence. His father must have been an artist, though he had never thought of it before,

and if so, he himself could be an artist if he tried. On the Jewelers' Bridge, just midway between the river-banks, where there is a break in little shops and the river appears, he stopped to resolve, firmly, unchangeably, that he would try.

The general found it useless trying to dissuade him. He would not — indeed he could not — give it up. He had eaten the lotos. He was as passionately in love with the beautiful art as his father before him had been with the beautiful Kathi. The guardian intrusted his charge to the care of an Italian artist, who had taken a strange liking to the boy, — a man of ability, who was to instruct him; and of common sense, who was to care for him, — and having received the position of Russian military consul in Syria, left Victor in Florence to establish himself in Beyroot.

CHAPTER XII.

FREEDOM AND FETTERS.

HOT as the flames that licked the feet of Dante treading the path "Purgatorio," fell the dry, parching glare of the summer sun all over Egypt. The Nile flowed silently onward. Its yellow-white waters creeping languidly along the steaming banks, were much inclined to stop there, and drying up, float off altogether on the dusty air, to try if that were not a less wearisome journey to the far-away, beautiful, dashing sea, whither it had wandered so long, and yet had only touched the hem of the flowing robe of lovely Cairo, the Viceroy's New Harem.

The sleek, shining rats ran lazily out of only half dug holes in the bullrushes on the bank, to sit upon their haunches, fold their fore-paws into little balls of fur to wash their faces with, while they blinked their bright black eyes at passers-by on the road from the city to the three great lower pyramids, in an independent way that seemed to say, "Indeed, I'm not at all afraid of you. You'll not take the trouble to kill a rat on a hot day like this."

Down that road jogged many a lonely Arab, his pack upon his back, his turban pushed from his veinless copper forehead, his lips moving in pantomime of speech, repeating passages from the sacred Koran, as

he pilgrimaged to Mecca. Often he would stop to wet his lips in the sacred river, murmuring, "Bless the Lord for water!" as he moved on again.

Beyond lay the city, and through the great arches of the bridge the old palace and cathedral were visible, their domes and turrets and a forest of tapering minarets glowing in the golden glory of the high sun. Along the river-bank abreast the city half-naked natives were always bathing, in compliance with the valuable sanitary laws of Mohammed, while up the long streets behind them crowds hustled and jostled the livelong day.

Not another city the sun shines upon has such a continuous, motley throng from all the four quarters of the earth as Cairo. There the naked beggar crowds past the sheik, whose proud head would not deign to bend to one lower than the Sultan or his Viceroy; and the haggard woman with her bundle of sticks, her dingy body clad only in a worn-out petticoat, brushes the skirts of a wealthy European lady, whose desire to see the sold sights or purchase Eastern clothes and jewels at the Oriental street-corners has called her where the houses are too close together to admit the wheels of her Western coach. There the proud Turk, with his turban of green, insignia he has won on a pilgrimage to Mecca, pushing to one side and gathering his robes in his hand to avoid their catching upon a fruit-vender's stand, strikes shoulder to shoulder with a groveling slave, whose features and color bear still the lingering imprint of the original Egyptian type, brought down in hieroglyphic art, and whose cheeks are branded by a hot iron with the name of his master. A huge, broad-shouldered chieftain from

the south, a black prince of Zanzibar, with thick lips and heavy forehead sloping backward, a broad white turban, and white linen enough wound gracefully about him to have covered a small army of his naked black vassals, sits cross-legged on a cushion at a street café beside a slender, pale-faced Greek, and lights a tiny cigarette at the huge nargile which the Greek is laboriously smoking. An Egyptian soldier, with a savage, curving sword and highly ornamented gun, brushes carelessly past an English naval officer. The English officer turns sharply, mutters the English curse, and stops to brush with his silk handkerchief the spot where the soldier touched his uniform. An American, in the uniform of a Turkish officer of high rank, hired by Mehemet Ali to live in Cairo and draw a governor's salary, steps one side and laughs at it, lights a cigar, says "By George!" and watches the Englishman while he brushes.

Close upon this display of national pride and personal importance came quite another, headed by a man riding on a gaily dressed donkey. "*Amahmal Ruh! Amahmal Ruh!*" he cried in a loud, ringing voice, as he rode along, which meant nothing less than "Turn out! turn out!" to every one indiscriminately. Behind him, led by a cord fastened to his saddle, was the lead-camel of a long caravan, and on the back of the camel sat the chief of the caravan, clad in the princely purple, fine linen and gold, — a proud Ethiopian from the desert border, bringing oil and spices into the rich market. Before his approach, as announced by his crier, market-women turned their raw-boned mules into the first by-way, while money-changers' stands and venders' tables suffered from the

unceremonious hurry, and donkey-boys, with a punch and a yell, turned their beasts about, regardless as to whose toes they trod upon; for might made right in those days in the streets of Cairo, and they are not very different to-day, when the weaker must turn out for the stronger, because the streets are not wide enough for them to pass.

"*Amahmal Ruh! Amahmal Ruh!*" cried the donkey-rider, as a man on horseback approached, when even the American, Egyptian, and proud English naval officer had stepped into alleys to let the greater man than they go past.

"*Amahmal! Amahmal!*" shouted the rider on horseback, in a voice that made the black sheik in the café start and the Greek drop the tube of his nargile, while the English officer looked at the American and said "Damn!" and the American blew a wreath of smoke into the air, sent a low whistle through it, and said "By George!" for there was but one alley leading from the narrow street between the horse and the donkey. Either the horse or the caravan must turn down that way, and the rider on horseback virtually shouted "Turn out yourself!"

The leader on the donkey looked back at the chieftain, over whose dark face an angry flush spread a richer glow. He rose upon one knee on his camel's back, and in as deep a stentorian voice as ever broke the monotonous vociferations of the street, cried, "*Amahmal Ruh!*"

He might as well have warned the west wind to turn its course for him; and as he threw his gun to his shoulder the stranger dashed a pistol from his

belt. They flashed together — a single report from the two weapons.

A wild cry rent the air; a cloud of purple, fine linen and gold, a turban and sandals, and a writhing Ethiopian chieftain fell into the filthy gutter of the narrow street.

The English officer pressed forward with a "Damn" upon his lips; the American pushed to the front, supplementing a low whistle with a faint "By George!"

When quiet was restored, no one thought to look for the bold claimant of the path. He had gone; but why should he not? The caravan would not turn out for him. He had dared dispute the way and turn the leader into the gutter. Why should he not have been satisfied and gone? It was fairly done, and the world went on as before. He was a white-faced stranger, dressed in Oriental robes, and mounted on as fine a coal-black horse as ever trod the ground. This much they knew, and let the rest go by.

But the coal-black horse had been given to a servant of the Hotel du Nil a little later, and the white-faced stranger in Oriental robes had entered the court.

A beautiful court was that of Hotel du Nil, almost as fine as it is to-day, covering an acre of ground with winding walks paved in white marble that shone as though the "Epiphany" frosts of Russia covered them, interlacing gardens where in only tropical profusion appeared every gorgeous color of the earth. A fountain trickled in the midst of each garden, and in the center of the court stood a royal pavilion, built in the form of a pagoda, and supplied with divans, punkas, papers, tables, and a limited collection of books.

The proprietor saw the man enter and hurried to meet him, removing his little red cap and bowing very low.

"Have you enjoyed your ride, monsieur? I hope this warm weather will not drive you away from us," he said, then noticing the face before him he exclaimed, "But why does the monsieur look so pale to-day? Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! what is the matter with the arm? Gracious me! it drips with blood."

He had scarcely arranged his guest, with almost a mother's tenderness, in his apartments, ordered the servants to remain in waiting, placed wine and a dish of his most delicious fruit before him, and sent three servants, offering gold to the one who should first appear with an English, French, or German doctor, when called away to meet some new arrivals.

It was a monsieur and madame of middle age, who came, the man a little beyond it; a servant or two, and a hand-bag or two.

"Will these rooms please you, monsieur?" asked the polite proprietor, bowing and showing his goods.

"H'm — if we've no complaints to make, your business is to —er—er— yes, to hold your tongue."

"As you please, monsieur," said the proprietor, who was strictly a man of business, even to smiling and bowing when spit upon.

"Exactly so," returned the other, in not an over-amiable mood.

"And for how long shall you be pleased to occupy them?"

"For a lifetime — yes — or a day, if at all," returned the other.

The proprietor was becoming sadly bruised, but

mustered a smile to ask, "Shall I send for the baggage?"

"H'm — well — yes, I think — er — I think not. If you will allow me, I will — er — yes, I will go for it myself, or send."

This was said with a low bow and satanic smile on the part of the guest.

"As you please, sir."

"Exactly so."

"Is there anything else, monsieur?" asked the proprietor, with his hand upon the door. He would scarcely have gone back had there been anything.

"Oh — er — yes, there is something else," replied the guest, still smiling. "I want you to — er — er — to get out, yes."

The proprietor got out, without so much as a bow. They promised to pay well. He could not afford to turn them out, but as he went he commented to himself, "A queer man that, and a beautiful woman. Very queer! Very beautiful!"

He was no sooner out of the room than the guest locked the door, and turning to an old servant, who had shrunken into one corner, said, "That room there is yours; get into it!"

This party disposed of, he turned to the beautiful woman, who had stood motionless through all, as though utterly careless of all.

"And now, madame," said he, bowing and smiling, "are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied with what, monsieur?" she asked, not a muscle but her lips moving.

"Oh, satisfied with life; satisfied to stay where you are if I chance to leave you for an hour, and not to

start off on a wild-goose chase after that man that became an exiled pauper six months ago, and long before this has rotted in the earth?"

She did not cringe or shudder; the time was past for such a demonstration.

"I believe," she said slowly, "that this place is Cairo."

"It is, madame, and a good way from anywhere."

"Monsieur von Bremen! Yes, I am satisfied."

The vicious smile spread over every feature of the Dane's face. "At last she yields to me," he muttered, and crept toward the woman.

"And are you satisfied, too, to give up that—er—that—er—that other—er—" He put his hand on her shoulder.

She did not move. She did not even turn her head. She looked at him. She said, "Take that hand off!" He took it off as though she had stabbed it with a knife.

He retreated a step or two, then shrugging his shoulders, extending his palms, and hanging his head upon one side, he said softly, "This is your—er—your last chance, my lady."

"Monsieur von Bremen!" she said sharply, "I want to know about Kathi Chichkini! You know! I saw you start when I called her name. Where does she live?"

"In Italy," the Dane replied.

"How long has she lived there?"

"Near twelve years."

"Is she married?"

"She's been married about eleven years, if I remember."

"Has she never in that time been out of Italy?"

"Not for an hour."

"How old is her child?"

"Near about nine, or a little more."

"How do you know so much about her?"

"That is none of your business, nor is any of the rest that I have told you."

"I expected that answer some time before," she said, with almost a smile, and it was as much a mystery at that moment to the Dane how he could have answered so many questions coherently. She had sprung upon him quickly. Before he had realized what she was saying, question after question had been propounded, and the answers had slipped, unaccountably, from his lips while he was gathering his senses. He saw with regret that she had learned all she wanted to know. He would gladly have denied it all had he dared to, but wisely letting a bad matter rest where it was, he repeated, "This is your last chance."

"Thank Heaven!" she sighed, then turning quickly toward him, as though already he had been forgotten, she replied, "Then, Monsieur von Bremen, for the last time, *Obey!*" She pointed toward the door. The smile on the man's face became a desperate, daredevil glare. He began again to approach her. She shrank back from before him, and caught a dagger from her bosom. It flashed above her head.

"Another step, Albrecht von Bremen, and this is yours. Beware!" she cried. "It waits for you, miserable Dane! I have used you as an instrument to accomplish a purpose. I have failed. Now I have done with you. I told you plainly in St. Petersburg that I did not go with you to be your wife. Sooner a hundred times I would kill myself, but it is not neces-

sary. It will answer every purpose if you are killed. Beware! I warn you. One of us two shall not see the sun go down, unless you leave me."

"You—er—you astound me, madame, you astound me, and I begin to comprehend you now." He walked slowly up and down the room, but did not venture again to approach her. "An instrument, yes, an unsuccessful instrument. Now what is peculiar about it is, that an instrument is precisely what you have been for me—a successful instrument. I have accomplished at least one great end, for which I became your slave, though my love must go away to feast itself somewhere else. When I flew to your relief, and sacrificed everything to care for you, your soft hands were empty. They were extended to me for help; I helped you. Because I did not do more you drive me away with a knife. Never mind! Unthanked, unrewarded, (except as I may reward myself," he added mentally,) "I go at your command. Only one word of prophecy I venture in leaving: Before ten days have gone you will wish you were Von Bremen's wife, but it will be just ten days too late; for I am never coming back again. Farewell! I leave you thoroughly freed from your fetters, thoroughly fettered by freedom."

The door closed behind him, and Albrecht von Bremen was gone, gone forever, as he had said. What could have induced him to come back again?

The princess's hand fell to her side, the flashing dagger dropped from her fingers to the floor. The needle point was buried in the wood, and the dagger swung backward and forward on its pliant blade. She tottered feebly forward and fell into a chair.

"What, gone!" she moaned. "Is he really gone? Gone for ten days, did he say? Who said it?"

Her eyes wandered aimlessly, staring at one object after another. The fingers traced restlessly the embroidery on the arms of the chair. "Where is Elise?" she continued. "I must call her, she must make a bundle ready. We must start when it is dark. One hour after sunset we must be on our way to Petersburg. What! he has locked up all the money? my money! Then sell these rings."

She extended her fingers and looked at them. Not a ring was there. They had all been sold. A strange, meaningless smile appeared upon her face, and her eyes wandered again.

"Yes, we must walk. We can do it. Russia is very large. It cannot be very far away. We will walk till we find it. I'll tell him the Dane has not so much as kissed my hand since that evening long ago. Are we going as fast as we can? Are the ten days up? Can he overtake us again? You say he has come home from Poland? What! and brought Kathi Chichkini with him? Oh, no, Elise; that was a great mistake of mine. It was all a great mistake about Kathi Chichkini. She was married and lived in Italy when I married the Prince von Meerschaum. Don't let me forget it, Elise. Are we almost there? The road is very long, and it is almost time — — time for — what is it almost time for, Elise? It was a terrible mistake, a terrible mistake; and how could I have made it? *Elise! Elise!*"

The old nurse thrust a white head out of the door at this unusual summons. "Did she call?" she whis-

pered. "Is she alone? It is the first time in six weeks if she is."

Searching the room, and finding that the lady was alone, she ran and threw herself at her feet. The princess uttered a piercing shriek, and drew her feet up into the chair.

"I thought you had gone!" she cried, — "gone for ten days and forever, and were never coming back!"

"Gracious! gracious!" sobbed the nurse, "don't you know me, lady, — I as has carried ye a baby in these arms, and not a day but these two hands have touched you since? Don't you know me, lady? don't you know Elise?"

The princess looked at her wonderingly for an instant, then moaned: "What was it he said about fetters and freedom, and freedom and fetters? It was all a great mistake, whatever it was, — a very great mistake, that I made about Kathi Chichkini, — a very great mistake! Oh! go away, go away from me!"

"No, no, my darling, my baby, my mistress, I will not go away! Oh me, she does not know me! It's an o'erragged path she's followed to find this madness at the end of it!"

While Elise sat wringing her hands and sobbing, and her mistress, paying her very little further heed, sat moaning sentence after sentence as her mind wandered, the proprietor entered.

"Madame, this is most unfortunate," said he. "The monsieur, on leaving for Europe, paid your bill only till to-morrow, and told me then to look out for myself. Will you keep these rooms, madame?"

She stared at him vacantly a moment, then shaking her head, replied: "It was all a very great mistake

I made, — a very, very sad mistake, — and there is some one I want to see about it, and some one I don't want to see, and you are neither of them. You may go away."

"That is most unfortunate, madame, and I will go away at once. The monsieur intimated that you had neither money nor means, and I am a poor man working hard for my living, — that is all, madame."

"Oh, will you go away!" she cried, and fainted in her chair.

Doctors came to see her; but when they learned that the strange man who brought her there had taken off everything, even the trunks containing her private wardrobe, that she had not even a jewel or a piece of silver, they shook their heads, said, "It is a hopeless case of brain-fever; she cannot recover," and thus left her to the care of Elise. But she did not die; and to the endless glory of that proprietor of the Hotel du Nil be it sounded abroad, that though a poor proprietor working hard for his living, he furnished those two women with a small but comfortable room, served them himself, gave them, when able to leave him, a receipted bill, and paid their expenses to Alexandria upon the coast.

The princess was very slow to recover her reason. Long after they had left Cairo she was often not at all herself, and if a stranger spoke to her, oftener than otherwise she would stare at him for a moment, then say: "It was a very, very sad mistake of mine! I know it! And there is one that I want to see about it, and one that I do not want to see, and you are neither one. You may go away."

With quiet old Elise all alone she was more her

self, and rarely showed any lack of comprehension of what was doing and to be done, after the long period of her doubtful recovery. She realized her situation perfectly. They could not get back to Russia. It would hardly be the thing to do if they could. She had left her husband with Albrecht von Bremen; she had been robbed and deserted by him. No one could know why or how, or the circumstances of that strange elopement. Her husband had been exiled; she supposed, possibly the Dane supposed, it was as an illegitimate child. He would be poor; and in her present state, even had it been possible to find him, she would be a useless, heavy burden that he had better do without. He could not understand, even if he could believe, the motives that had urged her in the past. He could not love her in her pride, much less could she hope to be loved in her fall; yet she loved him more even in his misfortune than she had loved him in his power.

Resolutely she said: "Elise, this punishment is less than I deserve. I shall bear it, thankful that my just desert has been withheld. We will go to Jerusalem, if we can get there. There is both a Catholic and a Greek mission there. We will give our services to God in return for his goodness, if either of the missions will accept of us." And the house she had been bound to honor was more honored by her then than when she became a princess in Castle Foam.

Elise, with pure animal instinct, seeing the trouble ahead, had gathered everything of any value, even to gold buttons from her lady's underclothes, and secreted them against a time of need. She sold them at Alexandria; sold the dagger, too, that had saved

her mistress, and with the money bought a ticket for her mistress by ship to Jaffa, the port-town of Jerusalem, while she herself, poor soul! slept on the deck when she slept at all, on the unsoftened boards, but oftener lay looking up at the cold, heartless stars, from her comfortless pillow, a coil of matted rope, praying, oh how earnestly! that the good God above, if God at all there were in heaven who was not always malevolent, would save her mistress from the dreadful lot she saw before her, even if to do it He must take her away to His bosom.

But the ways that we must walk in are not our ways; the paths that we must follow are past finding out.

Albrecht von Bremen, too, had come to this conclusion, after setting sail from that same port about six weeks before. He had laughed incessantly all the way from Cairo. "Yes, yes!" he had cried in ecstasy, "I've had enough of disappointment and misery to merit one grand success. There's a hundred thousand rubles' worth, and I fancy more, of jewels and gold in those trunks of hers, that I've been looking at and longing for, and lugging from pillar to post till I could throw every one off the track and get her where she could not get home again. That money will lend a noble hand to make me a million from the estates of Meerschaum. I must hurry home and conciliate Charlovitz. Doubtless by this time, after having done the work as I bid him, he has discovered that the bribery was all a fraud and a forgery; but never mind. If the work is done, it is too late for him to undo it. Let him squirm; who cares?"

Heinrich Charlovitz had not found out, however,

that it was all a forgery, for he had not so much as opened the papers to read the directions. The smoke of those papers had risen as the first burnt-offering which the priest made after his recovery.

The clouds hung heavy and dull over the Mediterranean sea when the Dane reached it, and the wind wailed round the outposts of the harbor. Seamen shook their heads and pointed windward, where the murky clouds were piled one over another, a red and yellow mist filling the air, the Fata Morgana preparing in that inland sea.

"What!" said he, "stay here a fortnight for another boat for the like of such pretty clouds as these? Those waves are soft as wool;" and with his stolen trunks he sailed away.

Lower hung the pretty clouds, until they lost their beauty, and the red and yellow mist became a driving gale as the Fata Morgana broke, and the soft waves, with their white caps of foam looking very much like wool, made the ship creak and tremble.

But what cared the Dane for that? He who could sleep soundly with an outraged conscience could rest well in a troubled sea. He slept till a little past midnight; then he woke. What woke him? — a creaking, a shiver, *a crash!* — and every beam of the boat warped and trembled.

There was hardly a shout from the officer on deck, hardly a cry from a terrified sailor, hardly a shriek from a strangling passenger. She went down like a ship of glass to the lower level of the brigand sea, shattered by a rock buried in one of those wool-soft waves. A sailor was saved by the fishermen on the island. A little girl was washed ashore without even

a bruise, protected by that especial providence that looks after children; and among a few corpses that had been given up by the waves, just one, that of a passenger, seemed to give token of life. The fishermen took that one to the fire they had built — had they built it an hour earlier it would have saved the whole — and began in their rude way to rub and roll him back to life. By and by they were rewarded, his eyes opened slowly, and fell first upon the great waves climbing the rocky ledge of the island.

"They are soft, very soft," he muttered.

Then memory began to dawn, and turning to the fishermen he asked, "Was the old ship saved?"

But no one understood him; they were red-skinned fishermen. His eye caught the white face of the sailor telling his beads on the other side of the fire, and thanking Heaven for his deliverance from the very mouth of the grave. He spoke to him in Italian, the foster-tongue of every Mediterranean mariner.

"Was the old ship saved?"

"No, no," answered the sailor in a gloomy monotone, and told his beads again.

"Was there nothing saved?" asked the Dane.

"No, no!" was the solemn reply. Then the sailor went on in reverie: "Everything, alive and dead, but three of us here, have long ago heaved to under the lee of some of those great rocks down there. St. Mary save their souls!"

There was no more need of rubbing life into the drowning man. He sprang to his feet, he shouted, he cursed like a madman. "Then why was *I* saved? Tell me that!" he cried and tore his hair. "I should have been almost a prince in Russia but for this.

Perdu! Sacre bleu! 'Twas surely not a lack of brains that lost me this. 'Twas neither brains nor no brains. 'Twas luck! my vile accursed luck."

He listened a moment to the waves that had ruined his chances, and that were rushing and roaring as regardless of him and his misery as he had been a hundred times of the misery of victims his intrigue had wrecked upon that treacherous rock of friendship trusted in that proved untrue. Then a grim smile crept over his face, his head hung upon one side, he shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes half closed themselves. He was thinking of the Princess von Meerschaum.

At that unfavorable moment a fisherman thrust before him a rude dish with a hastily cooked fish upon it. The Dane struck the dish and fish from the hand of the Moor, and sent them far over the sand. In another instant Albrecht von Bremen was lying on his back, bound hand and foot with strong cords, as by magic almost, and groaning for mercy. He thought they were about to kill him, and after all he did not want to die.

Thus the proprietor of the Hotel du Nil had received and discharged again one of the last parties of the summer to visit his house. The line of travel holds late, but does not begin early. There is a dead lull through the last of July and the month of August. No one visits Cairo again till the middle of September. The little proprietor had virtually shut up his hotel, but not entirely, for his guest with the wounded arm was still with him. The injury had proved more severe than even the doctors had feared, and had taxed their utmost skill.

"This mends very slowly," he said, as the little man entered his tastefully arrayed parlor. He always came in for an hour and a cigar in the morning. "I never imagined before that one of those rattling ape-tails* could do so much damage."

The proprietor laughed. He was a jolly little man, and laughed all over.

"But you are better off than the sheik, my lord," he said. "I fancy he did not think a little pistol-ball would do much harm; and the worst of it is he will never find out his mistake."

"Have you heard about it at last? Did I kill him?" asked the wounded man, evincing after all but little curiosity. "I fired for his forehead, but I was sure I should miss, I fired so quick."

The little man laughed again. "And did my lord ever miss? Your ball struck him so fair between the eyes that he never breathed after he touched the ground. A Greek student was telling me of it this very day. If he had seen you when I was your dragoman years ago, in Syria, when you followed that band of black Bedouins from the Dead Sea to the ford of the Jordan, all alone, with one small pistol in your hand, he would have turned out for you without your asking."

And the little proprietor laughed again.

The wounded man shook his head. "I almost cried then," he said, "for every man I hit. I shot them in their legs and arms, to save killing them, though every one was doing his best to take my life. Times have changed, or I have changed. The world

*The long barreled flint-locked, highly ornamented guns used at that time by the Turks, in which they fired heavy shot.

has used me so roughly that I have lost all respect for it. I cannot meet to-day with a show of authority over me, but I kick against it. A miserable weakness in a man, I am willing to confess."

"It's the way of the world, my lord. It hardens, it suffers from what it hardens."

"I think," said the wounded man, lifting his arm from the table — it was his right arm — and putting it in the sling, "that if I should get out a little more, in spite of this heat, it would be good for me. If you will have a carriage here sharp at three o'clock, I will drive down to the pyramids."

The great bell for arrivals rang. The little proprietor leaped from his chair, and tied his cravat and re-curled his moustache. Such an unheard-of thing as an arrival at this season meant news of some sort. It was only an officer come for a day or two. He was passing Alexandria on business, he said, and as it was now or perhaps never, he thought he would brave the heat and see Cairo now. He was given one of the coolest rooms opening upon the lovely court, ate a lunch, and sat in the open door, smoking and waiting the cooler afternoon. It came at last. He was preparing in his mind how he should turn his steps, when the figure of a tall, powerful man, dressed in an Oriental costume, even to a curving sword and a red fez, crossed the court. A strange, unaccountable chill swept over the officer as he looked. The man's back was toward him, and he walked slowly, but the newcomer stood riveted to the spot till he of the wounded arm turned about at the distant corner of the court, crossed obliquely through the summer house, and left the garden. He followed him. He saw him enter

a superb coach, and the horses start. He hailed an English carriage that was passing. The driver was an Arab, but shook his head. He was evidently engaged to some one else. The officer pressed a gold sovereign into his hand that closed convulsively upon it, and motioned him to follow the coach that had just driven away. Gold conquered, though the task was a hard one, for the horses in the first carriage were fresh, strong animals, selected by a careful proprietor to please the taste of one critical in horseflesh, while those that dragged the second were every-day coach-horses. So it chanced that he of the Oriental robes and wounded arm had reached the pyramids, and sending his horses away to shelter, had walked down to where the huge sphinx of Ghizeh lifts its flattened head out of the sand drifts, and stares with eternally open eyes from Cephron, Cheops, and Mycerinus far away over the trackless desert, before the man in uniform appeared.

From a distance the officer had seen him go down there and hurried to the spot; the sphinx prevented the two men from seeing each other. A moment more and they faced each other. One red with heat and with anger, the other white with suffering, mental and physical.

"General Wolzonn!" exclaimed one with a smile.

"Victor Reppoun," said the other with a frown.

"Do you come as a foe?" asked Victor Reppoun, in surprise, looking down at his wounded arm.

"I come as avenger of the blood of my cousin," said Constantine Wolzonn sternly. "What the Tzar, being your friend, would not do, I, being her nearest relative, must do. I command you draw!"

Only a sharp contraction about the mouth of the exile told how bitterly he felt that thrust. He offered no word of explanation. It was not that he had been charged with murder, not that he was told that the law had dealt too leniently with him. That might have been explained. The general was an old friend, literally a bosom-friend. He of all others had good cause to be charitable, he of all others had many reasons why he should forgive. He least of all in Russia should say, "Let him be punished more." Not only did he forget all this, but in the vigor of strength he stood before a man who had spent nearly two months upon a couch, and whose right hand hung helplessly beside him in a sling, and said to him, "I command you draw!"

> "Lo blow, thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> Freeze, freeze, thou winter sky,
> Thou dost not bite so nigh."

From the sheer animal instinct of self-preservation, — with these cutting thoughts of being forgotten, of being cursed, of being challenged under such circumstances, — his left hand drew his sword and raised it just in time to catch the officer's blade before it touched his head. Then began the unequal duel; and the lonely, sad-eyed sphinx up above them was seconds, judge, and umpire, all in one.

The right arm as it hung in the sling twitched nervously to feel the weight of the blade, but the thing was impossible. The prince was a dexterous fencer, and the left arm served him in a way that astonished himself, and caused General Wolzonn more than once to fear that his anger would cool before he could gain

an opportunity to strike a blow. His victim parried, but did not dare to thrust; possibly he did not want to. In an unguarded moment he stepped backward. His foot sank lower than he expected. Involuntarily the left hand rose to restore his equilibrium. Taking advantage of the miss, Constantine Wolzonn struck the sword from the other's hand, and in the impulse of the instant, the spirit of his murdered cousin appearing in startling reality before him to cry for vengeance, her breast made bare, a dagger-hilt protruding, just above his head, he shut his eyes and felled the Prince von Meerschaum, unsworded though he was, much as he had struck Count Kramareff. He did not see the body fall, but without a groan, a heavy, lifeless weight, it struck the ground. With a shudder the general sheathed his sword. Mad curiosity dragged his eyes once toward the spot as he turned away. White as marble and perfectly senseless, the prince lay stretched upon the earth. Not a breath or a last sigh moved the light robe that crossed his chest. His right arm had left the sling, and from a deep, ugly gash across his temple and cheek the purple flood of a victory lost flowed over the white sand.

"She is revenged!" said Constantine Wolzonn as he walked slowly away. Was he happy? Surely not. He was a soldier; in some senses a brave soldier. He realized keenly that he had done the meanest, most outrageous thing a man could do, except to stab a sleeping enemy in the back. "Yet," he said, "'twas nearer equal by far than the struggle in which he drew my cousin's blood."

It must be remembered in his behalf, that in those days, in Russia, human life was not considered such

a sacred thing as we hold it to-day, if occasion offered to take it; and the old law of an eye for an eye, which was still strong, demanded it. There was nothing in the moral side of this murder which could conflict in the most delicate degree with the reformation that was still the end and aim of General Wolzonn's life. He did it as an act of justice. Doubtless of himself he would have refused to make the attack altogether; doubtless even he would much rather have avoided it — have warned the prince, if that could have been done, to keep out of his way. But how could he be the man he longed to be, how could he be the guardian of her child; most of all, how could he be goaded night and day by that terrible vision, the pale face, the extended hands, the naked breast, the dagger-hilt, the blood, and leave the murder unavenged? It was impossible. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," was seldom heard, seldom believed. He had even registered in a church the vow that Victor Reppoun should not cross his path but once. This had relieved him in part, and to have fulfilled the vow and drawn the dagger from that breast completed the satisfaction. The sting of the cowardly act alone made the sweet draught very bitter; but the vision never came but once again, and that was a long time afterward. Evidently the spirit of the murdered woman had been satisfied. Immediately on returning to Calcutta, Constantine Wolzonn left for Alexandria. "Too hot," he told the proprietor, as he paid his little bill, and in Beyroot formed for himself a quiet bachelor home, living a life that exemplified all of his best intentions, showing what a model man he could be if the sea was calm.

He heard from his protégé with each mail-ship from Italy, and from the artist, of his growing attachment for the boy, and of the ever increasing skill he evinced in the beautiful art that had taken him captive.

As the months rolled on, the little Victor improved so rapidly in his work that his master allowed him, simply for encouragement, to paint a picture for the yearly examination of amateurs' beginnings; at which examination the best two were to be selected and hung in the lower corridor of the large gallery. The artist spurred him on to this endeavor with every enthusiastic encouragement. His wife, a dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty, quite worthy an artist's choice, had seriously objected at first to Victor's coming into the house, and had at last but reluctantly consented, — which reluctance did not die out with time, but served at least to make the artist himself more kind, more gentle, more thoughtful to the fatherless, motherless boy, though he had taken pains to give his wife no information whatever regarding the boy's birth, parentage, or future prospects, lest it might in some way act as prejudice.

Victor told the artist that he was painting a Madonna for the exhibition. What Madonna, he refused to say. The artist very much wondered which of the reputed Madonnas he had chosen to copy, and what the result would be, but stubbornly refused to allow any one to enter the boy's little studio, which adjoined his own, till the completion was announced. Early and late the little enthusiast kept himself upon his work like a master, till his ruddy cheeks grew alarmingly pale. But at last the work was finished. He

opened the little door, announced the fact, and fled to his old hiding-place far down the Arno.

The artist called his wife, and together they entered and drew the cloth away from the canvas as it stood upon the boy's little easel.

"My God! my God!" exclaimed the Italian; and his hand trembled as he held up the cloth. "My God!" he cried again, "I could not have done it! I could not have done it! That boy will be the greatest artist Florence ever knew!"

But his wife made no answering comment. A dark crimson flush burned on her cheeks. A fierce, low fire flashed from deep in her dark, beautiful eyes, while her trembling lips whispered, "Holy Mother, keep my darling girl!" For, instead of the rare Madonna face which her husband admired, she saw upon the canvas, in the pencil's living lines, the beautiful face of a darling girl, an only child scarce a twelvemonth over ten years old, every shadow and expression perfect as a photograph, yet with an indescribable something about it, a mist of maturity rendering the face a fitting support for the Madonna halo about it. It was just what the mother had been ten years before, — what the darling girl would be in ten years yet to come.

It was a wonderful victory. Every one joined with the Italian artist in praising the little painter; and almost unheard of though it was, the child was one of the two successful applicants before the committee, and his Madonna head hung in the lower gallery. It hangs to-day in another gallery, a private collection, and is praised as then. It is doubly praised, for no one sees it now but some one whispers in his ear that

it was the triumph and victory, both in love and in art, of the child of a falsely banished prince.

But the mother's heart rebelled before the soft beauty of the picture, and a bitter something memory cherished lived and burned afresh in it. Mists dimmed those dark eyes, and the picture faded from before her. Wind seemed rushing through forest-leaves above; great trunks of trees surrounded her; water rippled and sparkled at her feet. There were white-bells, and blue-bells, and long-fingered ferns rising above them. Was it the sunlight on the tears in her eyes, or a broad blue lake through the branches and an old mill yonder? Trees, flowers, water faded from before her into two eyes that were looking down at her, and two proud lips that whispered, "I love you; come with me." And she believed them; she had dared to answer, "And—be—your—wife?" Then the daylight grew dark, and the rude wind rushed over the water and through the trees and swept them all away, as from the gathering blackness came a hollow echo sounding back to her, "*All but my name.*"

She had known those eyes again the moment she saw them under the boy's forehead, and, clasping her child in her arms, thrown all the bitterness of that memory into the prayer, "Holy Mother, keep my darling girl!" It was, after all, a foolish prayer; but, alas! like many mothers, she did not see the folly of it. The Holy Mother, in all wisdom, had selected Victor Reppoun to keep that darling girl of hers.

CHAPTER XIII.

POUR LES PAUVRES.

ELISE and her charge were delayed ten days at Alexandria before they started; hence it chanced that Constantine Wolzonn sailed upon the same vessel, but the princess was confined to her room, and Elise had eyes and ears for none but her mistress.

Several times the officer noted the old woman passing and repassing. There was something familiar in the face, and more than once he was on the point of speaking; but she was so changed with her changed lot, who could have recognized her? He let the opportunity go by.

They landed at Jaffa. Elise was the last of the passengers to engage a boatman to row them ashore. She preferred to be last; there were not so many inquisitive eyes fixed on her. They were alone in a dirty, leaking boat, with four opium-besotted boatmen, half-naked Arabs. A priest in a pilgrim's long cloak, such as is often worn in Syria, stood upon the wharf, leaning against one of the damp, dingy pillars that support the custom-house roof, and apparently reading, while his eyes wandered far over the water. As Elise gave the drunken boatmen a piece of silver they saw another in her hand. It was the very last she had. They were already overpaid; but seeing

more, and only two women to defend it, they determined to have it, and because she would not give it up, one of them seized a cloak that hung upon her arm, and the rest gathered round him to divide it.

This was too much. The old nurse wiped her forehead with a corner of her sleeve, in sheer despair. She had no more tears to shed. She fell upon her knees before her mistress with just one sob, that broke through the ice that was rapidly incasing it.

"Oh, my mistress, my lady!" she cried, "it's little more that your old nurse can do for you! They have taken everything that is worth anything, and I too old and weak to stop them! Oh, why could you not have died when I first held you in these old arms! But it's almost over now: a few hours more we shall both be gone. Here's the last we have to buy bread with, and there's no mercy in these parts. We'd best be on our way into the other world, let come what will there."

The priest pushed his cowl over his head and closed his book. His appearance was quite that of a Capuchin monk, except that his girdle was not a knotted rope. He bent his head to listen.

"Elise," said the princess, "I have made a great mistake. I am ready to suffer, and to mend, if mend I can, the damage I have done. It grieves me that you must suffer too. If I could prevent it, I would most willingly. Till I am able, be patient. Do not bid me look for another world till I have something better to say for this."

A man rose suddenly up within the priest. He strode with the step of one of authority toward where the Arabs circled about the cloak. He laid his hand

upon it. The man who held it refused to give it up. In another instant he was squirming on the wharf, too nearly senseless to cry to his fellows to revenge. "Swine!" hissed the priest in Arabic; that curse of all curses, except those cursing the mother that bore them, that galls the Arab most. Then he threw a coin on the ground, and while none of them dared pick it up, and not one of the officials offered to interfere, he singled out a French dragoman from among the by-standers, and giving him some money, bade him take the women to an hotel, see them provided for, and return to him.

It was too warm to travel by day; but in the afternoon they were placed in a comfortable palanquin between two mules, and borne over the hills to Jerusalem; while all night long the solitary priest walked silently behind them over those forty weary miles, across the broad plain of Sharon to Rahmel, where they rested at the old inn, surrounded by the high stone wall, with the gate for the horses, the mules, or the camels, and the needle's eye for the pilgrims, and the white paved court within; then down through the valley of Ajalon, where the ground was covered at that season with the bright yellow half-moons, blossoming between the rocks, from seed sown there, the guide said, in that long afternoon when, for Joshua, the moon stood still in that valley of Ajalon. At Kirjath-Jearim, the people of the dirty village crumbling away with the hill-side, roused by the furious barking of the dogs, thrust their heads out of their low windows, probably just as their predecessors had done when king David, one midnight, struck his harp before the rescued Ark of the Covenant there.

For very little ever changes on those old hill-sides of Judea. As they reached the summit of the mountains, the Holy City lay before them, tinted, beautifully tinted, over its flat roofs and domes, and towers and minarets, by the rising sun. But to what unappreciative eyes! The princess slept. The nurse looked toward Jerusalem as though she looked into the gate of hell, surely with no more of hope in her old eyes. The priest following the palanquin at a little distance, apparently praying or reading earnestly, crossed himself as the city domes appeared, then seemed almost instantly to forget it.

He placed the two in the Russian hospice, paying their board, and through the official directed them to remain until they should hear from him.

A few days later a younger priest called from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. He proposed that they two should sit inside the door of the church, holding boxes "Pour les Pauvres" for the contributions of visitors, and offering them for their support a quarter of what they collected. This was, to some degree at least, what the princess had hoped for, and she very gladly accepted it, though it was some time before she said more to the priest than that she had made a great mistake, that he was not the one she wished to see, and that he might go away. He was a quiet, intelligent man, and surmising something of what the circumstances must be, patiently waited, explored, led her on, and at last won her into understanding him and consenting to this labor for the church.

Thereafter, each morning as it came brought a messenger from the church to conduct them thither, and

in the afternoon he took them back again. Two women dressed in black, their faces covered always with black veils, holding small white boxes with black lettering, sitting just inside the door in the winter, and in the shadow of the arch outside through the summer, will surely be remembered by any who visited Jerusalem in 1834.

The boxes proved lucrative. The priests voted the strangers a complete success; while the share which each night came to the two, Elise scrupulously laid by, saying, "Some day we shall take that and go back to Russia." Now and then Elise spoke to the official of the hospice about their board, but it was always paid in advance of her questions, by some of the friendly priests,— probably the one who had brought them up from Jaffa, thought the nurse.

At last a time came when there was enough gold and to spare to carry them to St. Petersburg, and Elise asked, "M'lady, when shall we start?"

"Start for where?" asked the mistress.

"For home, m'lady, St. Petersburg. We have money enough laid up."

"Can that be possible?"

"Yes, m'lady; over a thousand rubles. I have kept good count. Shall we start to-morrow?"

"And how much will it take to reach St. Petersburg?"

"Not more than three hundred rubles, at the most, for each, m'lady."

"Count out three hundred rubles, Elise."

"Three! m'lady?"

"Three."

"For one! m'lady?"

"For one, Elise."

"Which one, m'lady?"

Elise was not born to question. She rarely did. Such a strange command, it must be allowed, might tempt a stronger mind to question. "Which one?" But as she received no answer, she quietly executed the command, wondering all of the time "which one?"

She handed the sum to the princess, gathered up in a handkerchief. The official of the hospice had given them gold for their silver. The princess took it, looked into the handkerchief much as she looked at a stranger, shook her head, and almost said, "I have made a great mistake." Then she looked at Elise.

"Is this quite enough, are you sure?"

"Yes, m'lady. The officer below told me two hundred and fifty."

The princess held out the handkerchief. "Take it, Elise," she said. "I promised long ago that when I was able you should bear this no longer. I did not dream we had so much and could travel for so little."

Elise looked up, and asked another question before she took the handkerchief. "What shall you do with the rest, m'lady."

"I shall send it, Elise, to the priest who brought us up from Jaffa, to use as he may see fit for those who are poor and have need of it. I did not ask the Lord for wealth. I asked him for work to do, and for mercy. If he has both of these for me, I can cheerfully return him that money which he has lent me to see what use I shall make of it, and wait his time to leave Jerusalem."

Elise took the handkerchief by the four corners. She held it at arm's length and let three corners drop.

The gold fell in a heap at her mistress's feet; only a few of the coins rolled away.

"If the Lord wills that I should leave you, let him pick that up again and put it in this handkerchief," said Elise slowly.

She waited a moment. Not a piece of the gold was moved. Elise was apparently satisfied, and with her lips pressed painfully together, she gathered up the gold, put it into the box in which they kept the whole, and asked, "Shall I send for the priest and give him this?"

"No, Elise; he might refuse it. Find out his name, get a Russian note from the officer below for the amount, and send the note to him so that he shall not know from whom it comes. There is no need that we make much of doing such a thing."

But the blow was too much for Elise. She had lived on the hope of seeing her old home again, and though she bore it without a murmur, when the hope was extinguished the last spark of vitality seemed to vanish from her old and shattered nerves.

The winter had brought them well toward Christmas time. The church was daily filled to overflowing with visitors and pilgrims. The two women in black had never before reaped such a harvest. Sometimes at night their boxes were almost full. They made the sum equal to fifteen hundred rubles by the time that Elise had discovered the priest, who was only a pilgrim after all, serving a penance as altar-keeper and the like, and had sent the note. And though Elise obeyed her mistress as nearly as she could, the pilgrim had said to the messenger, "This comes from the two women in black at the door?" and the mes-

senger had said, "I am forbidden to tell;" but that was quite sufficient.

Then came a change. The spark that began to tremble in Elise when her mistress's determination was made known, suddenly went out. The old nurse died in her bed one night without a warning pain. The princess found her in the morning, and a flood of tears fell over the cold face, from eyes that Elise had said to herself had forgotten how to cry, and for two days no one sat at the door to beg.

Remarkable providences wait sometimes for those who are helpless. The princess could have done nothing at all alone. Even when strong and well, she had never known an opportunity to lift a finger for her own welfare. She knew no more than a child how to arrange her dress and hair. Some one, however, had been prepared for her.

Less than a week before the old nurse died a strange lady had come to the hospice, — one evidently neither rich nor poor, — accompanied by a young man of twenty, or a little more. She had become much interested in the women in black; had asked many questions about them; had seemed to follow them as they went and came; had even spoken once or twice to the old nurse. But Elise was crabbed and short in her answers, when she thought people inquisitive.

The news of the death did not spread very generally over the hospice, yet the strange lady was beside the princess before any one had given a helping hand.

Strange how captivating intelligent heart-sympathy may be! And yet it is not strange.

The lady had first knelt beside the princess at Elise's

bed. She had not spoken much, but ere long had even wound her arm about the princess's waist, kissed her pale cheek, and led her to a chair, where, after smoothing the bed upon which the body of Elise lay, and covering the face with the sheet, she began to arrange her hair, even more gently than Elise had done it, — that thick, soft, snow-white hair, that had once been so much like the sunlight. She must have been a close observer, for she asked no questions; she talked of matters as far from anything present as could be imagined; yet the hair was arranged precisely as Elise had always done it, and her clothes were put on as she was used to having them, with a readiness and gentleness that made the stranger seem even less of a stranger than Elise had been for the last two months. The princess even asked her to remain with her that night.

"I should like to remain with you always. I should like to take Elise's place if you should please," she said.

"What! and live the hard life that we have lived? We have no reward for it but our board and the love of God."

"I have done many harder things," said the stranger.

There was something in the tone or the way she said that simple sentence that touched a chord of sympathy, a spring of love. It was a strange sensation. She replied, "If you could be happy so, I should love to have you stay."

Altogether, the tears she had shed for Elise, and the new thoughts and feelings inspired by the stranger, proved very beneficial. The princess was more like her old self again; she even smiled. The stranger

asked her, "Are you quite satisfied with what you are doing here?"

"It is for God," she said; "I have no choice."

"But there is much work for God in other places. There are lands where Christians are not all pilgrims, you know, and there are tired hands and weary hearts in those lands that need cheering. We can hardly realize, until we see it, how much there is for any one to do who will give a life to God in a Christian land. You have a kind heart, madame, and a very gentle face. There are thousands of fainting ones in the city where I have lived, that would bless God to see you coming to their door to comfort them."

Thus the lady talked throughout the evening. It was entirely a new revelation to the princess, a new life opened to her. It was a sunny side of duty, brought to light by this very sunshine that had taken Elise's place. Before the evening was spent she said, "I have made a very great mistake in life, and the more I can do to atone for it the better. I will go with you to your city, and work for the Master's poor ones there. But it would be ungrateful to these good priests to go when my little box is doing its best for them. Let me stay two weeks, just through the New Year's festival, then I will go." And the stranger replied, "Then let me take Elise's place with you, and hold her box until we go." And so it was arranged; and two women in black again held the boxes at the door, though the worn-out mortality of the faithful, loving, true-hearted Elise had been borne away by the priests, and buried outside the walls.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLOUDS LIFT AS THE DAY DIES.

IS it too wide a retreat to glance back again to where Albrecht von Bremen lay bound and pleading for his life at the hands of the fishermen on the rocky island off the Syrian coast?

He was partially successful; they neither ate nor killed him, but they kept him well bound. The sailor and the little girl they put upon the first of their boats that was going to the main-land with its cargo of little fish for canning in oil. He had surmised that this would be the case, and had managed to write a letter to send by them to any authority that might have power to relieve him. It is useless to follow this letter from hand to hand, authority and authority, till by the simplest accident, a hair's breadth and less in itself, it came to the knowledge of the Russian military consul, Wolzonn.

"Von Bremen!" he said, "Von Bremen! that man must be saved. I must see him, be it how it may."

General Wolzonn obtained a Turkish requisition and military escort, and started in a small vessel for the island.

Von Bremen had long before given up all hope of rescue, and devoted himself to cursing his luck, and

wishing they would kill him quickly if kill it must be, for he looked upon the fishermen and treated them as savages and cannibals, when his feet were unbound, and he was carried, being unable to walk, before the officer who had come for him.

He had not looked up as he approached, his eyes being shut, as he cringed and shivered under the pain inflicted by the motion of the fishermen.

They set him down. He looked into General Wolzonn's face, then caught the shoulder of one of the fishermen to support himself. His nerves were not so strong as they had been.

"H'm, I had better have been left alone," he muttered.

"You are mistaken," said the officer. "Should I deal with you as justice would dictate, you had better far be left to any fate. You have injured me almost beyond conception. I will be more lenient, I will be more honest. I have gathered from different sources certain facts; I want you to bind them together for me. Do this, and I take you away from this island. Remember, I promise nothing more. I will take you away from here, if you will answer my questions in a way that the facts I have already gathered shall assure me you speak the truth."

"I will tell anything," said Albrecht von Bremen.

"Then begin at the very beginning, and tell me all you know of Kathi Chichkini."

The Dane cringed, but his life was hanging by a thread. He sat down on the sand, and told Constantine Wolzonn all he knew of Kathi Chichkini. Therefor he was carried back, as promised, and set down in Beyroot.

General Wolzonn was disappointed. He had long harbored an idea of seeking out the girl, notwithstanding the argument of the count to the end that he had not stolen her. The Dane had been for six months a prisoner when he found him, and though he had really less information to form his judgment of the man's veracity upon than he would have dared admit, he yet believed that for once the man had told the truth. Possibly it was because he told something so very different from what he had expected. At all events, while he was astonished, more than that even, he was also disappointed, and let the matter drop. He felt guilty in doing so; yet, after all, it was at best a choice between evils. He would have felt guilty to have interfered with matters as they were. It was an unfortunate break upon the serenity of his life, and reflection upon it brought back many times the sinking heavy-heartedness that had for many years been his constant companion. Perhaps it was not amiss after all that he should sometimes be reminded that he was still mortal, and not altogether perfect.

New Year's Day came; the first day of 1835. General Wolzonn was upon his semi-annual visit to Jerusalem. He sauntered carelessly up and down a short section of the Via Dolorosa, in front of the Turkish government-office, waiting the movements of one of those slow officials who will stop and roll a cigarette and smoke it out, if they think you are in haste, before they answer you; and if your business seems to impress you as a matter of great importance, requiring an immediate action, they will then tell you to call the next day at an appointed hour, when they

will have more time to attend to you. If you know the Turk, and really wish to see the officer, you will not go at the hour he appoints.

Strangely apropos with coming events, what Coleridge calls the spirit of great events striding before the events, was a scrap from Schiller, which the officer, innocently enough, quoted while he waited, thinking only of the time he was wasting, which was not of much importance after all:

> ". . . . Oh, Time
> Works miracles. In one hour many thousands
> Of grains of sand run out; and quick as they,
> Thought follows thought within the human breast.
> Only one hour! Your heart may change its purpose.
> His heart may change its purpose. Some event decisive
> May fall from heaven to rescue him. Oh, what
> May not one hour bring forth!"

Then, as he sauntered, his thoughts ran back to the bones he had left to bleach between the hot sun and the white sand, under the shadow of Ghizeh, the temple of Anaraches. He was absently gazing down the long, narrow street, when suddenly his aimless attitude and expression changed to one of intense activity.

Many narrow lanes terminate in the Via Dolorosa, and from one of these he saw the figure of a man enter between the high walls that border the way of Christ's cross-bearing, and in an instant become lost in the crowd that was moving away from him.

"What!" exclaimed the military consul so sharply that the Arab servant beside him fell upon his knees. But he knelt unheeded.

"By the immortal gods! if that was not a ghost it

was the Prince von Meerschaum!" ejaculated the excited officer.

He forgot the Turkish official, forgot the trembling slave, forgot everything but to lay his hand upon his sword, and run toward where the man had disappeared.

Reaching the spot where the way between the high walls curves southward, toward the strongly blockaded Golden Gate, he stepped upon a block beside a door, and saw, not twenty feet ahead of him, that same figure of a man.

"Can the grave give up its dead?" he asked, and trembled. For he had sown the wind down by the pyramids. Had it risen up a whirlwind, and must he reap it?

He stood on that stone step poised between two of the strongest animal impulses of his life, namely: To fly? To follow? He followed.

Not far beyond them was the spot — traditional of course, spurious perhaps, but just as dearly loved by many as though no scholar doubted its authenticity — where the cross at last rested, and where, after the veil of the temple was rent in twain, a sepulcher was opened for Him who entered it to conquer death. Across the square, before this spot, the figure in Oriental dress walked leisurely, and entered the gloomy, low portal in the great Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built so low to prevent fanatic Turks from desecrating the holy spot by riding in on horseback.

General Wolzonn paused outside the door, beside the two posts in whose shadow two women in black sat to beg in the summer time.

"I will not stain the holy place with blood," said he, "but when he comes out I must kill him and not fail, for my own life as well as for her death."

There was, after all, more of the old man left in Constantine Wolzonn, hard as he had labored to expel it.

As he in Oriental robes passed the two women in black he stopped to drop a coin into one of the boxes. He stopped longer. He stood looking at the hand that held the box, till sheer politeness to a woman turned his head away, and he crossed the main circle of the church. Under the dome he stood irresolute.

"What hand was that?" he said, passing his palm over his forehead, as if to wipe some obscuring veil away. "It has taken hold of me. I can see it, feel it beckoning me, while some stronger incentive impels me not to look again. A dread foreboding threatens me. Could that be Kathi Chichkini's hand? No, no! The thing is absurdly impossible. Hers was short, and fat and brown; this was narrow, thin, and white. But whose was it? I have surely seen it somewhere, and it has made a deep impression on me."

A priest pulled his robe. "Have you seen the sepulcher?"

"Yes, I have seen it many times, but I will go again. Light up your taper. *Where have I seen it?*" he asked himself absently.

"Why, right behind you, sir," the priest replied.

"Yes, yes. I was not speaking of the sepulcher, father. Is your taper ready?"

"Ready and wasting."

"Then lead on." And to himself, "It is the strangest thing that ever crossed my life."

"It is indeed a strange — strange —."

"I was not thinking of the sepulcher, good father."

The priest entered the low doorway. His follower had stooped to enter, when he stopped and turned half about, then shook his head and muttered, "No, no, I dare not look."

The priest had thrust his head out of the door and caught the words.

"You have nothing to fear, sir. You may look till —"

"I will look, good father. I was not thinking of the sepulcher." He entered.

He had not dared look back. Why not? Had he looked back he would not have entered the sepulcher.

While he stood looking at that hand the princess had not moved. The moment he turned away she raised her veil, the first time she had ever raised it outside of the hospice, and turning to her companion who had taken Elise's place, she said, "Could he have recognized me?"

It was a simple question, but she asked a second time before the companion replied, "Could who, my lady?"

"Why he, the Prince von Meerschaum."

"Do you know him?" asked the other.

A sudden realization of her situation swept before her mind, and with it the painful conviction that she did not know what she was at that moment, if anything at all, to this Prince von Meerschaum. It was like a tidal wave of suffering. It ingulfed her. A moment before she would have said, "He is my husband! I will fly to him!" When the wave had passed over her she drew the veil back again, and only answered, without a quiver in her soft, melodious voice, "I did know him, yes; but it was years ago. I do not wonder he has forgotten me."

The blood of Kramareff still had valor to do and dare. The reply was a resolute determination to let the opportunity go by. Her companion did not break the silence that followed with even a breath. She was wise. When the soul struggles with itself, it is too busy to turn its thoughts out of the windows. Her head fell heavily upon her hand; that thin, slender, and white hand. It was displayed to its perfection as it rested outside the black veil, to support her head.

Long and silently the hand rested there — a position like a beacon-light, the most prominent thing in all the church, as the prince came out of the sepulcher. Involuntarily his eyes fell upon it. They became instantly fastened there as by some strange spell. Yet it was only what he had seen before — a hand!

The Greek service began beyond the sepulcher. With an effort of a strong will the prince turned away, having come to no other conclusion than that he had seen that hand before; and in a moment more

was absorbed in the familiar form he had so often listened to at Schaumburg.

The princess, forgetting altogether her surroundings, forgetting even the pain the resolution not to be recognized had cost her, had been upon a long journey. She had been with her cousin Major Wolzonn up to an old witch's den, in Switzerland. She had been looking at pictures in the white smoke, — reading her life history.

"But the last she lost," she said to herself. "Ah! what shall that last picture be?"

Leaning against the stone post, it may be supposed that General Wolzonn became uneasy. Worse than that, he felt his courage oozing out of his fingertips, and he had very little confidence in himself when the coward was uppermost.

"Will the villain keep me here till dark?" he muttered; and a little later, resting his hand upon his sword, entered the church, adding, "He shall die where he is, or I will die there."

The church was literally crowded with pilgrims and visitors. From Christmas to New Year's Day is a festival only exceeded in popularity by the Easter pilgrimage to witness the Holy Fire; but in spite of the vast throng, which was most closely packed about the Greek chapel, witnessing the magnificent New Year's service, almost the first person to meet the officer's eyes was the Prince Reppoun; and directly over his head, so real that Constantine Wolzonn could not for one moment doubt that it was indeed the actual

spirit drawing him on to do his duty and seal his vow, hovered that pale face, that flowing, sunlight hair, those pleading eyes and outstretched hands, that naked breast and dagger-hilt.

"Ah, why hast thou not told me," he muttered, "that my duty was not done?" — and never took his eyes from it till he stood close behind the prince, whose back was toward him. His arms were crossed, his head bowed forward. He did not move till close behind him he heard a voice pronounce his name:

"Victor Reppoun!"

Turning suddenly, he beheld the man whose face he remembered with such a bitter pain as it had been translated to him in Egypt, standing again with drawn sword, — yes, even with his sword raised to strike, before he had given a warning word.

It is the faculty that wins life's victories for some men that they can act instantly and act well. Other men, with far more brilliant opportunities, virtually throw them all away by blundering in emergencies.

In truth, the officer did not dare to give his enemy warning, or more at least than would grant him a moment's realization that it was the hand of the avenger, before he struck. The blade was falling; a narrow glimmer of yellow light flashed along its polished surface from the candles on the altar. The crowd involuntarily pressed back as the officer approached. They stood in a little circle, quite alone. The prince could fall to the ground without touching one of the by-standers. But the prince was not ready to fall. He had turned his head, and in an instant comprehended all. Before he had time to move his body, he had grasped for that uplifted hand to hold

the blade; but he missed it. The sword did not fall so low as to meet his grasp. The hand of a Greek priest had clutched that of the officer and held it still higher. The prince turned toward the priest with a smile, and said:

"Good father, you have saved my life. I will thank you later."

He stepped back and drew his sword. The priest let the officer's hand drop, and shrank back into the crowd without a word.

"You are late, general," said the prince calmly, as they crossed swords. "I have my right hand now. This is a church; can you not wait, and let me go outside with you?" He held the officer's sword above his own while he spoke.

"A life for a life, here and now!" said the officer fiercely; and endeavoring to take advantage of the other's position, he made a sudden thrust.

"Not yet!" said the prince, parrying. "The blood is not upon my hands, but to-day I shall revenge myself on *you*, for these two times that you have played the coward with me!"

He placed himself in position for the duel. The officer made another sudden thrust, and a bright spark flew toward the altar as their swords met.

The commotion and the voices caused the princess, sitting by the door, to lift her head. She grasped the hand of her companion, exclaiming, "It is he! it is he! and in danger! O God, save him!" And rising, she rushed toward the spot, about which a dense crowd was already gathering.

"General, be careful; when I say *three*, *look out!*" said the prince, eying him as a wild beast ready to

spring upon a prey that has maddened him. Then slowly and distinctly he began to count: "*One — two* — THREE!"

With a sudden motion he twisted the officer's sword from his hand; it shot through the crowd and fell before the altar; then, grasping his own blade in his left hand, he struck the officer full in the chest with his right. He reeled and fell backward. The prince smiled.

"Unsworded and fallen," he exclaimed, "and without a scratch. Now, friend Wolzonn, get up and behave yourself."

He took the hand of the officer, who was almost unconscious with fright, and lifted him to his feet.

"One has fallen!" swept from mouth to mouth through the crowd. The princess heard but could not see which one. With a shriek she struggled to separate the crowd. The great church became a stifling cloud and whirled about her. She raised her hands and fell backward, striking her head heavily upon the iron railing about the Stone of Unction.

"What voice was that?" exclaimed the prince. His head was high above the crowd, he could see everything. He saw —— a white hand raised in the air, a face like marble behind it, as the princess fell backward.

"My wife!" he exclaimed, and with a strong arm hurling the crowd right and left, he reached the spot and lifted her gently upon one shoulder.

The ignorant rabble took his haste as flight from justice, and the cry of "Stop him! Stop him!" rose from every lip as the crowd became infuriated and pressed about him.

Holding his wife firmly with his left arm, he raised his right hand above his head and his clear voice rang loud above the shouting of the multitude: "Make way for me, or I shall make my way through you!"

Then the crowd fell back, and he left the church without so much as brushing one of them with the hem of his garment. But no sooner had he passed than like the air severed by a flash of lightning, the two parts came together with a crash, and every one struck his neighbor, and every one was struck by his neighbor, in one of those mad riots where no one knows why he is striking or why he is struck, that are unfortunately frequent even to-day in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

As he passed through the low doorway, he noticed the woman who had been the companion of the princess, and who till then had remained beside them, turn to go another way.

"Madame," said he, "you have been doing me an unspeakable kindness. Will you not remain by this lady a little longer, I fear she is dangerously wounded and will be much in need of help."

The woman in black made no reply, but turned to follow.

General Wolzonn had hurried across the square. He touched the prince's arm and knelt beside him.

"My lord, I cannot understand this at all," said he; "but whatever it may be, my rooms are the best in Jerusalem. Take them. For mercy's sake, let me do something; you are more than welcome."

"Friend Wolzonn, you are yourself again; lead on, and I will follow," said the prince.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FULL SUN AT EVENTIDE.

"Softly as Apollo's ray
O'er Neptune's kingdom fades away,
Lingering on Oread's heights
Faint and fading Tyrian lights,
Should life's hour of twilight be
Welcoming to Mercury;
The King's high messenger who waits to bear
The ransomed spirit through the air
To Charon, who by dark Berisium
Shall ferry to the blessed Elysium."

IN an hour the princess had recovered consciousness. She was in a luxurious apartment, with her companion and the doctor, trying to recall a happy vision upon which she had closed her eyes.

The doctor knelt beside her. His face wore that anxious look of foreboding which one watches at such a time, as the South Sea mariner looks hard after the departing albatross. It bodes no good to the troubled watcher. It is the signal-flag of danger to life's wearied mariners who would guide a precious bark that in spite of them is dropping, dropping down into the gulf of death.

He whispered, "Do you suffer any pain, my, lady?"

"No, monsieur," she replied. "I feel quite well, but very weak."

He rose softly. The companion of the princess looked at him with eager inquiry. There was no light in his eye as he left the room.

The Prince von Meerschaum met him just outside the door, where he had been anxiously waiting.

"She is not dead!" he gasped, looking into the doctor's face.

"No, my lord," he replied.

"Doctor," said the prince; but he silenced him with a gesture of his hand.

"Life is too sacred to require a bribe for a struggle to save it," said he. "Her system was too weak to sustain the shock, it has yielded already, she is perfectly conscious, and may live for an hour; but do not waste your time in vain offers, for the wealth of the world cannot keep her more than that."

With a trembling hand Victor Reppoun turned the latch. His heart stood almost still. His tongue was heavy with a prayer for mercy. No thought occurred to him that he had aught to forgive as well.

In the interim the princess, who had read the truth as plainly as though it had been spoken, and who had recalled what had passed in the church, turned calmly to her companion, and said, "I am going to die. The Master is satisfied. Can the Prince Reppoun be found? I should like to speak with him."

As she asked the question he opened the door.

There, upon Eastern cushions, lay one whose face, still beautiful, the dark eyes darker for the snow-white hair, he was only in dreams to see afterward; one who, but for himself, would have been the consummate felicity and pride of his life. And something told him in that moment that she loved him

still; through all, in spite of all! He approached the couch. The soft eyes fell on him. She smiled.

"I made a very great mistake," she said. "I sinned terribly; but God has forgiven me. Can you?"

Could he forgive?

Could she forgive?

Her last words, lying locked in her husband's arms in a first and last embrace, were these:

"Then, let the blighted past fall from its withered limb. Ten times over I would have borne it all for this. Oh, I would linger so! This dying is too sweet to have it over with."

She smiled again, a smile that lingered on her lips longer than the breath of life. How many tears that smile would have saved had it come earlier! How many tears it saved coming when it did. There was a celestial beauty about it. It was the first shadow of the angel's smile that ever afterward guarded and cheered the life she loved; and doubtless its continuance was first to meet him when his sowing and reaping times were also over, and the almost was forever in the blessed "by-and-by."

The sheet had covered the beautiful face for an hour. The prince stood by an open window, alone in the room, when a heavy tramp of feet upon the stairs, and boisterous rapping upon the door of another room of the consul's apartment, caused him to open a door that would admit him to the room thus assailed. Then, doubtful if it were anything which he should know, he drew the door partly together again, but stood there still; for, without waiting for an answer, he saw a Turkish officer enter the room, and the gen-

eral spring from his chair and ask fiercely, "Why this intrusion?"

"I come with orders to arrest the man in Turkish dress who caused a riot to-day in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and has taken refuge here."

"He caused no riot," said the general sternly, pointing to the door.

"I am not come to argue," the Turk replied, sullenly.

"Then go!" exclaimed the general; "for ere you touch that man, the point must be well argued."

The Turk struck the floor with his heel, and several soldiers with drawn swords entered behind him. General Wolzonn grasped the sword which the prince had removed and laid upon the table.

"Your words are useless," said the Turk. "The house is well guarded. I come peaceably, but if resistance be offered, every member of this house goes with me to answer for defying the scepter of Mohammed."

"Not one until my life is taken," replied the general, planting himself in a position of defense.

The prince thought it time to interfere. He stepped between the two. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am sorry to be the cause of this dispute."

"My lord!" exclaimed the general, endeavoring to push the prince one side, out of the way of the Turkish officer. "The Greeks, Armenians, Latins, Copts, and Syrians, Christian sects worshiping in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, are continually rioting and brawling among themselves, till more blood is shed in that building than on many battle-fields. The Mohammedans own the church, and to prevent them

from keeping a guard of Turkish soldiers tented under the roof, the church authorities agree that whenever a riot occurs the government shall arrest a man, no matter whether innocent or guilty, and demand a fine equal to two thousand rubles."

The prince replied quietly, "The law seems just, and law must be obeyed. The government has surely made a good selection, for I confess that in my haste I did most rashly that which stirred up the riot." Then turning to the Turk, he added, "Sir, I will go with you. May I have any time to prepare myself?"

"What!" exclaimed the general, "to spend ten years in a horrible Turkish dungeon? My lord prince, you do not go. If either, it is I. But is not Russia strong enough to protect us against such an outrage?"

"It is hardly an outrage, friend Wolzonn. You forget you are beyond their power. They cannot bind a Russian official. But I, my dear fellow, I have no country." A tremor told how deep a suffering those little words expressed, and the clear voice was husky as it asked the Turk again, "Sir, how soon must I be ready?"

Another officer entered the room and exchanged a few words in their native tongue with the one already there, handing him a paper. He read it through, folded it, sheathed his sword, and bowing as politely as a Turk can bow when he chooses to be a gentleman, said, "Sir, or my lord, if I may congratulate you, my work is already done. I am officially informed that a man has given himself over and paid the fine, and that the scepter of Mohammed is satisfied."

He had reached the door before the prince could ask, "Does your information state who such a strange man may be?"

The officer was all politeness. He took out his paper again and read: "A Russian pilgrim doing penance in the church, named Heinrich Charlovitz."

"Heinrich Charlovitz! Yes, I thought as much," said the prince, turning to General Wolzonn. "'Twas he who grasped your hand by the altar. So be it. He has repented. A genuine penance is such a sacrifice."

The soldiers went out. The prince, worn out with the long day, entered the chamber of death again, and threw himself upon a divan.

Yes, it was Heinrich Charlovitz! Long before, when he had wrestled all night with the Lord, on the frozen hillside above Schaumburg, before he dared give the customary farewell blessing to the boy Victor, the voice from heaven that seemed to speak to him had said: "You did this wicked thing, thinking your reward would be the chief position, in the chief sect worshiping at the Holy Sepulcher. Go now, instead, upon a pilgrimage to Jerusalem."

In parting, Victor had made him a present of two hundred and fifty rubles. He had counted it another sign from heaven, and had never gone back to Schaumburg, lest the sight should weaken his resolve. He had not been two hours in Jaffa—he had not even left the wharf—when the princess and Elise approached. Faint-hearted, homesick, discouraged he thought himself, and had leaned against the pillar, wishing—as Elise wished to her mistress a moment later—for a little plot of ground large enough for a grave. His

life at the altar had been one of simple penance. He had not come to be honored in Jerusalem. In the first six months his money had been nearly all expended upon the board of the two at the hospice; but he began to extend his services and to receive pay, and all that was not spent upon the princess was hoarded up, in the hope that he might some day send them back to Russia to claim their own. His courage failed when they sent him the note for fifteen hundred rubles, but he had laid it away with the rest till he should be directed how to use it.

He was performing some of the functions of a priest at the altar upon this New Year's Day. He easily recognized the Prince von Meerschaum and the approach of the officer, and was ready, when the moment came, to intercept the blow. He eagerly watched the duel and the restoration, and said, "Thank God! May all go well with them!"

The united body of priests had met, (it was only upon such occasions that they ever were united,) and Heinrich Charlovitz met with them.

"Send the soldiers for the man in Turkish dress," said they. "He was seen to enter a house beyond the Well-corner. We understand he is a prince, and doubtless has the money required. It will save our paying it."

Heinrich Charlovitz waited to hear no more. He folded his hands over the same old Bible, worn and ragged now, and whispered, "I thank thee, Father, for another opportunity."

He took the money — he saw now why Providence had willed it sent to him — and with it paid the fine, gave himself over, and the work of the priests was

done. They instantly became five distinct, antagonistic elements, and the hubbub and worship and blasphemy went on much as before, and as it always has gone on, and is going on to-day. Many never even missed the silent, pale-faced Charlovitz, who had come in a moment unbidden, gone in a moment unfarewelled. But little did Father Charlovitz care for that. He had not come to Jerusalem for honor. He was happy at last — happier than he had been before since the tempter to evil had spoken to him under the naked branches of the tree by the little church at Schaumburg; emancipated by the shackles that hung upon his wrists and ankles, and the gloomy dungeon-walls that frowned on him. He never was tempted to regret the step, but he looked at the irons and the walls, and thought of how he had once entered another dungeon, and in the pride of a wicked heart had said, "These are the hands that bound those shackles there." And the regret vanished. He was ready to suffer.

False at heart, he fell, conquered; but tried in the fire, he rose again, and conquered. Bitter fruit the seeds of evil brought him; but from the harvest of suffering he went out again with weeping, bearing precious seed, from which, sowing, one will surely come again rejoicing, having reaped an abundant harvest. Who can tell of the blackness of such a cloud of sin, when it hangs over one, but he who has seen it? who else of ecstasy, when the clouds break away, and through them pours blessed forgiveness, like the full sun at eventide?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MILLS OF THE GODS HAVE DONE GRINDING.

IN the quiet moonlight, just before the next day was breaking, the priests had borne away the body of the princess with those beautiful funeral rites of the Greek Catholics, beyond the outer wall, and laid it restfully beside the slumbering Holy City. It was all over, and the prince was lying upon a divan, when he suddenly became aware that he was not alone. He opened his eyes, but looked no higher than the dress to know that it was the woman in black who had cared for his wife, then he closed them again. And still in a soft, strange voice, a voice that seemed the burden of a sob and yet a smile, she said, "This is the Prince von Meerschaum?"

Mechanically his lips answered her, "I was," before his weary eyes had opened.

"Victor Reppoun," she said, "will you tell me if you know me?"

His eyes ran up from the black skirt to the white face, from which the veil and hat had been removed. He leaped from the divan, then sat slowly down again. What a conflict was waging within him as he answered, "I do know you, Kathi Chichkini."

"I supposed you would have forgotten me."

He shuddered. "It could not be."

"Ah! I vex you by being here, but I did not come for that. The past should be forgotten with all its pains and pleasures; the present alone is valuable, if out of it we make a future that is invaluable. You said that once to me, and I laid it very much to heart. You hate me without cause. I am not come to ask your love, nor would you give it if I pleaded for it." (The prince moved as though he even yet doubted himself.) "Listen to me, and you will not regret it. In the fall, after you were hunting by Arantha, I was taken away from the miller, given in charge of an artist who lived outside the Roman Gate at Florence, Signor Giovanni, you saw him at the lake, and told to become his wife. Three months ago, Albrecht von Bremen, of Denmark, fled to our house, pursued by officers. He thought they would take his life. He spent all night in telling me a strange history, and giving me papers and proofs of what he said. He is imprisoned in Florence now for twenty years. My husband went to Petersburg and easily obtained your pardon, and this letter from the Tzar and Council begging you to return. But he died before reaching Florence again. Then I came here and found your wife. I did it simply to right a grievous wrong, and beg you to accept, as such, these tokens."

"With my whole heart," said the prince, "I ask your pardon for the past, and thank you for this present. But to accept your kindness and go back to Russia, ah! lady, I could not do it, though all the empire did lie in the dust and beg."

"Ah, my lord, don't tell me that!"

The prince kneeled. "Because you have done this, inspired by some kindness not common among men, and because you ask it, I would gladly go, as I

would more gladly give you my life as thanks, if to sacrifice it might serve you, or if such a mean sacrifice might recompense. But, lady, you will crown your generosity if you will accept my thanks and let me stay a wanderer."

"What!" she exclaimed, "is there no tie of friendship there? No fellowship? No fond association that one might plead to draw you back again?"

"Not one! I have learned to be a wanderer;" and yet his voice trembled as he said it.

"But you will be weary of this wandering," she said, "and when you are, remember that pardon waits for you at St. Petersburg. And fear not, I pray you, to take refuge in my little home outside the Roman gate. The princess, your mother, whom you loved so dearly, was a Dane. My mother was a Dane, but though I never knew her to love, I have at least loved dearly that ideal mother of my heart. Let this be a bond of friendship between us that shall never be transgressed or widened. Promise me that you will come. There is a friend of yours living near to me, whom I know you would be glad to see."

The prince rose, and taking one hand in his and laying his other hand on her head, after the fashion of the Polish peasants, said, "May God reward you, Kathi Chichkini Giovanni, and may he forgive me! I am not worthy to enter your house. I am not worthy that you breathe one breath for me. But *she* was worthy for whom you have done so much; would she had lived to enjoy your kindness!"

"Victor Reppoun," cried Kathi Chichkini, "you do not know what you are saying. You do not know what you are doing, if you refuse me this promise.

For you if you believe that I have done anything, let me know at least where I may find you, if a matter of importance should demand it. And when that time comes, you shall admit that I have not asked a foolish thing."

"Kathi Chichkini, I promise you. When I was able, I fortunately spent much time in study. Now it enables me to support myself in writing for several French and English publishers. Here is the card of one of them. They always know as well as I, which is not very well, where I may be found. Farewell."

She had turned to leave him.

"Farewell, Prince Reppoun," she said. "You will not regret it if you come to Florence."

Before she reached the door, General Wolzonn had entered and stood beside it.

"Madame," said he, "for one moment, let me entreat you, stay. My lord prince, pardon me. This lady did not close the door when she entered. Through the crack I heard you say, 'I know you, Kathi Chichkini.' Call it eavesdropping if you will. I have listened to all the rest, because I knew it would end in this way; and, Prince Reppoun, the lady has something more to tell."

"Friend Wolzonn, what is this you say? Is there still another mystery? What a snarl our lives are in! Kathi Chichkini, have you something more to tell?"

"I do not understand the officer. No, there is nothing, Prince von Meerschaum. There is not another thing to tell. Pray, sir, let me pass you, for I will go out."

Still the general prevented her.

"Nay, only a moment," he pleaded. "Prince Reppoun, join with me."

"I tell you, sir, I have nothing more to say; and I will go."

"Then, lady, I shall tell it after you are gone, and he will follow you before you are out of sight," said the officer, as he stepped one side.

She waited, saying, "Sir, there is no need to tell at all. If you have politeness toward a lady, you will hold your peace."

"Then there is something," interposed the prince. "And now, lady, my curiosity is on fire. Is it something that I should not know?"

She made no answer for a moment; then turning shortly to the general, said in that sharp, quick tone that seemed to the prince to come directly out of the woods by Arantha, "Please, sir, say what you have to say as quickly as possible. I will have bravery and listen, if you are a coward and betray."

"Friend Wolzonn," said the prince, "if what you would say will cast a shadow in this room, then I protest I will not hear it."

"I say it, my lord, because it will bring sunshine! But first I will ask, with hosts of others, will you not go back to Russia? Think, my lord, of the House of Meerschaum."

"You know already," said the prince, "that to sit upon the throne I would not go back to Russia! Three months in a dripping dungeon thrust a poisoned dart in here, that Meerschaum has no balm to heal. Life has been sweet to me till now, for there were desires in life. I would find my wife before I died, and be forgiven. I would see Kathi Chichkini, and

be by her forgiven. I would know that the Dane, that affluent mischief-maker, was well out of the way of making any mischief for my boy. I would see the Russian Tzar and Council convinced that they were wrong. I would know that Father Charlovitz had repented of a very great unfaithfulness toward me and mine, that I might love him again as I loved him through all our early life together. And last of all," he smiled, "I would wreak a little vengeance on my old friend Wolzonn, for his left-handed courtesy down by the pyramid, and then convince him, if I could, that revenge was not required of him. During this present day all these desires have been fulfilled with an astonishing rapidity, that seems to be ominous almost that my days of life are done. At all events, I have nothing more to look for than to live as God would have me, till He calls me hence. What folly for me to run after a princedom, I, who have had too much of one already! What next, friend Wolzonn? This was an untimely interruption."

"The next, my lord, is a confession. When I was a boy, in a moment of passion, I struck with a sword and killed a nobleman. The only one who knew of it was Albrecht von Bremen. You pity me. Yes, I was to be pitied. Five years went by. Then, to keep him from disclosing the murder, I allowed him to drive me to become a party to carrying off the daughter of a Russian nobleman. There was no search made for her, because the parents, the father at least, desired it, and paid the Dane well for doing the work, that there might be but one heir to the estate, while I supported the girl to hide the murder. Now I have confessed enough to show you that I

know of what I speak. Beyond this, tell me, prince, did you ever hear of Marie, Marie Reppoun, in all your life?"

"Marie? Yes. Marie Reppoun? I have read that name many a time on a tablet in the little church at Schaumburg."

"But, my lord, the body of another child was laid there. Marie Reppoun was not dead! She—sh—In fact she stands before you!"

The general, in his characteristically blunt way, having leaped upon the point at last, after taxing himself to the utmost to perambulate about it, succumbed, and crept back into a corner. He had done his duty, and there were certain reasons why it cost him many a hard struggle before he nerved himself to begin, and finally got through with it. The prince caught the small figure in his arms. "Kathi, is this true?" he cried.

"It is true, my dear, dear brother," she whispered, and clung about his neck for an instant. Then pushing herself away, she said rapidly, "But it does not matter. Let me go now. It was partly because it was my mother, too, whom you loved, that I wanted you to come to Florence. Now you will come, will you not, my brother, and tell me all about her?"

In her anxiety to go and leave the matter just where it was, it had gone already much further than she wished. She did not notice that, white as marble, the prince had staggered backward, and was leaning heavily against the wall. His voice faltered absently as he replied, "Yes, Kathi, I — yes, I will go to Florence. Wait!" He pressed his hand upon his forehead as if trying to solve something inexpli-

cable. "Wait!" The general and Kathi both started toward him. "Kathi, there is still a mystery. You know more! Tell me! tell me! I — no, I am not your brother; no, Kathi, no. I see it now without your telling me. It comes dimly but more clearly out of mists of fraud. The Princess von Meerschaum had but one child; that I know. They told me I was the only child; that Marie was adopted; that Marie died. But see!" He drew the medallion from where it still hung about his neck, and looked at it eagerly, comparing it with the face before him, while Kathi cast a withering glance at the officer, that seemed to say, "I told you so," and the general began to wish he had listened before. Neither had thought the prince would go so far. "There is her hair," said he, "her eyes, her cheeks, her mouth, and in character her nobility. Lovely Kathi Chichkini," he cried, falling on his knees again, "you are her child, her only child! and I — I — I must have been adopted! And the Dane was right, and the priest. Why did I not listen?" He rose slowly to his feet. "Great Heavens! I, who am not higher than a pauper, have lived and gloried in a princedom, while for that, a princess, who from my position I did not dare to stoop to marry, has worked for her daily bread! What an anomaly! 'To err is human, to forgive divine.' I have been human; Marie Reppoun, can you be divine?"

She had almost smothered the last words which she would not hear, clasping him again about the neck.

"Here is her medallion," he continued; "take it; you will love it as I have loved it. There has not

been an hour that it has not felt my heart beat, since the time she gave it me." He turned to the general. "Friend Wolzonn, take up this case. You took her away from a princedom; it is but just that you should take her back again. Promise me that you will faithfully see Marie Reppoun established in Castle Foam as the heir of Meerschaum!"

The general knelt with one hand on his sword-scabbard. With the other he crossed himself, and answered, "My lord, I swear it."

"And, by the way," added the prince, "let me commend to you good Charlovitz. He should be ransomed quickly, and if you see fit to reinstate him over the little church in Schaumburg, you will find a sadder, wiser, and better man for the past failures and sacrifices."

A shadow crossed the face of the man who had so manfully stood to duty, though it made the prince a pauper in the hour when he became a prince again. He would not have it known, and, with a hardly forced smile, walked to the window. The new princess was not less quick to see than the discerning peasant girl. She silently crossed the room, and clasped his arm that rested on the sash.

"Victor Reppoun, did you think I would do it?" she whispered. "You are brave; you are noble. Remember! Kathi Chichkini says that. But now you are thinking of your boy, the little Prince Victor. He should be thought of. My daughter was born to earn what she lived upon. Victor was born to be a prince."

The prince interrupted her. "If Victor is fit to be a prince, he is well able to be a man. The pain I

suffered was not because I feared he would grumble at his lot. A braver boy I never knew. He will work in the world like a man, and will thank me for telling him that he is but a man, as I should have thanked one who would have saved me from occupying another's place so long. But how do you know of Victor?"

"I know him well and love him well. He has lived with us for a long time. It was to see him that I would have had you come to Florence."

"It was your husband under whom he studied?"

"Yes."

"And your daughter whose face he painted so successfully?"

"It was my little Kathi."

"I have heard about it," said the prince. Then he was silent for a moment. Suddenly he looked down into the dark eyes that were raised to his just as they had been at Arantha.

"The girl is a picture of the mother," he said slowly. A mother's eyes are doubly brilliant when one speaks to her of her child.

"How do you know that?" she asked, with the old smile from Arantha.

"I went to Florence to see the picture," he said. "I heard of it in Egypt. She will be as beautiful and very like your mother." The clear voice trembled. He dared not trust himself to speak for a moment, then he asked, "Does she love Victor and he love her?"

"Such children!—twelve and thirteen years old—to love!" she said; but he read another answer in her eyes.

"'Tis well," said he, with an answering smile. "Let Victor be a man. I will write him a letter. No, I will see him and explain it all. You shall take Kathi to Meerschaum. It is a lovely spot, though full of gall to me. Then, when the time shall come, if he shall wish and she be willing, let them marry. God bless the match!"

"And now, Kathi-Marie," he added softly, putting his strong arm about her, "you are coming to your own in spite of this wicked world and your noble generosity. The justice of Heaven would have it so. You have lost but a few years at the most, may you have many, many more. Nor will the past be altogether lost to you, for the lessons of the peasant shall give wisdom to the princess. And mind well, Kathi, you could not find it in the royalty of empires to give you one heart-beat of the satisfaction that was yours when you left me by the lake at Arantha."

They stood thus, silently, for a long time in the shadows growing darker till all was black but the twinkling stars above, then Kathi slipped from his side, only pressing a kiss upon the hand that she lifted from her shoulder.

He was alone, sweeping with an understanding, comprehensive glance the mysterious intricacies of the past, each day, each hour burdened with the hand of God and man in conflict. The agony he had suffered, the prayer he had prayed, came back to him. Slowly he repeated it.

Then he added, "At last I understood it all, and see the answer to my prayer."

CASTLE FOAM.

PART III.

"Never here, forever there,
Where all parting, pain and care,
And death and time shall disappear—
Forever there, but never here."

THE END.

EVERY thing comes to an end except a circle. We have rambled about over many lands together, following fortunes far apart from, yet, after all, very close to each other, and it is full time that this rambling came to an end. Let us get back again, if we can, to the place from which we started, and say good-night. I have wearied you to read, and for you I have wearied me to write. An even exchange is no robbery, and the clock strikes six. Tea, toast, a cigar and the newspaper, doubtless you will agree with me, will be much more to the point than another hour of this.

It was in 1856 that I was hunting up in North India, with the party described in the first chapter of this book. Eighteen hundred and fifty-six! Twenty-one years after the events that closed the last chapter. To build a little bridge across will take but a moment.

Victor Reppoun went to Florence and saw his son for the first time since the melancholy breaking up at Castle Foam, and did not see him afterward, for several insurmountable barriers. The boy bore the news, as the father had predicted, "like a man." Upon the day that he was twenty he received as a birthday gift the sweetest little note, from the sweetest little girl imaginable, who, according to the wish of his

father, he had not seen again; saying that she had been true to the little love promises of twelve and thirteen, and that, if he would like, her mother invited him to come, as he had promised, to Castle Foam for the holidays. And that same mother did not let him go away again.

The estates Von Kramareff were forfeited by the countess, and of course fell to Constantine Wolzonn. The fact that this must result from the disclosure he had obtained from Albrecht von Bremen had acted strongly, with other objections, to keep him so long from declaring it. When at last he became the Count von Kramareff, he did not know what to do with himself. He walked through the elegant great mansion like a sheep upon a sand hill. He thought of renting it, but that would not do. Once upon a time he had grumbled almost to cursing his luck that he was not born noble. Now that the nobility had come, he would almost have asked to be excused. He was to be found at the mansion from bed-time till breakfast had been eaten, no longer. The servants at last gave up preparing for him any meal but breakfast, and never opened a room of the house but they were told to lock it up again. They said the old countess had been bad enough in her solemnity, but this man was intolerably worse. At length, one day, he fell to talking about the past in Frau von Ockel's library; moralizing over the curious meandering of affairs. He had been silent for a moment. One of the gloomy shadows of that past had darkened his brow into a stern frown, when the frau, with one of her merry laughs that made every one about her happy, stopped directly in front of him.

"Well, well!" she said, "if you are not the very soberest man I ever saw!"

"I was thinking," he replied with a slight laugh.

"Possible?" asked the lady incredulously, arching her voice and her eyebrows. "And pray what could you find to think about on a bright day like this?"

"To tell the truth, I was thinking how insignificant I have always been, and am always likely to be, in this fate-governed world."

"Those are pretty long words," she replied; "but did I not tell you years ago that the world would not follow the beck of one little finger, no matter how much of a finger it might be?"

"But you did not tell me, lady, that it would pay no attention at all."

"Well, well! And think if I had told you all that at once, it might have discouraged you."

The frau went on with her work. She was making some comfort for a sick woman, and the fingers flew as though they were used to such occupations and enjoyed them. There was silence again in the little room. Born of the silence, a new idea came with a leap into the new count's head. Strange, marvelously strange, he had never thought of it before; but to this day, reader, there are some who are marvelously stupid in the matter of new ideas. When it did occur to him, however, he spoke it out after his own blunt fashion, and without so much as trying to preambulate.

Frau von Ockel was "taken quite aback," as ladies say, and thoroughly surprised, no doubt. She laughed. Blessed ray of sunshine! Did any one ever know of a time when she was not laughing with those who

were ready to laugh, who so often wept with those who were weeping?

"But you and I are quite too old for such fly-away nonsense," she said.

"It is not nonsense," said the new count. He was actually kneeling before her. "I know that my hair is more white than brown, but my heart is young when you are about. And as for you, God knows, lady, you never could grow old." So it came about that there was a Countess von Kramareff again. And fortunately the countess was an improvement, if that could be, upon the Frau von Ockel whom every one loved.

Thus matters stood at St. Petersburg when we went hunting in India in 1856. For five days, shooting by the way, we rode northward; past herds of the silver-hoofed gazelle in the jungle, and stork and flamingo in the marshes. Cool blew the breeze from the highlands to the north of us, as on the sixth morning we mounted our horses. We had reached the hunting-ground for the famous black buck, and a royal day the snow-crowned hunter promised us. As it wore on, the old man grew excited in the chase. He stripped off his Hindoo robe, and bare to the waist, his broad shoulders burned almost as brown as his face, contrasting strangely with his long white hair and snow-white beard, on his black charger white with foam, he certainly appeared reveling in his native element.

A drove had run to cover in a deep jungle to all appearance impenetrable. Tall palms, like sentinels about the outer edge, waved gracefully their loaded heads, seeming to say, "Thus far and no farther;" while vines, trailing from trunk to trunk and through the thick undergrowth, substantiated the opposition. But

the drove had entered, and the coolies must follow; while we formed a half circle at a little distance from the jungle.

"There is handsome game in the jungle," said the hunter, and he was right.

He grew impatient before the coolies had been as long as usual in the shelter. "The lazy fellows!" he exclaimed; "they stop to lunch on plantains the moment they are out of sight. Wait a bit, friends, and I will do their work for them."

He dashed the rowels into the black sides, and the horse with a leap crushed his way into the undergrowth.

There was a dead silence for a moment. No ordinary sound from within ever comes out of one of these jungles, and even the deep breathing of the horses seemed subdued in the strange silence outside. I fancied a chill, foreboding evil, ran round our little semicircle; a dread presentiment. Was it possible?

That silence was broken by a terrific roar that shook the earth and seemed almost to rend the very sky. An instant, and the sharp whinny of a horse in pain mingled with a human cry burst upon our ears, as the huge Arabian black sprang from the jungle like an antelope. Two riders were upon his back. One was the white-bearded hunter, hugging with one hand his horse's neck. The other rider was a royal Bengal tiger. With bound after bound the animal tore past us, but his double burden fell heavily directly at our feet.

I sat upon my horse momentarily paralyzed by the shock. Next me sat the man to whom I devoted much of the first chapter. The hunter fell between us; the

tiger still above him. His turban had fallen off; his face was buried in the thick fur. But from high on his bold forehead, down the left temple, and lost again in his heavy beard, a broad white scar was plainly seamed against the bronze skin.

"MY FATHER!" cried the one beside me, and before another man could move he had leaped from his horse, and pressed to the hilt his hunting-knife into the tiger's throat. Loosing his hold, with one wild howl, the tiger rolled over and lay dead. But death had not come from the last blade, for fastened in the hunter's hand, in a grasp we were unable to loose, was his own long hunting-knife dripping with blood. He himself had killed the tiger, but the enormous weight falling upon him from the horse had returned a death vengeance.

Breathlessly we stood about him, applying what we could of restoratives, while the coolies hurried for the tent. At last his eyes opened. They fell upon the one who was naturally kneeling nearest him. They smiled. The eyes smiled. "Victor, my boy!" said he.

He had known him! What a strange power of the will that should keep that knowledge till he chose.

The shadows gathered. We made a bed for him where he lay, and placed a tent over him. The coolies on unsandaled feet brought in the cup of oil and lit the floating wick. Having done all that could be done, we left the tent and our stranger-friend with the dying prince.

I had scarcely entered my own tent when a hand was laid upon my shoulder. It was the hand of Victor Reppoun.

"Will you be a friend in need," said he, "and watch with me to-night?"

On a camp-chair in the door of his tent I sat the long night through, facing the darkness and the broad plain, dotted with its blacker jungles; sat and listened, there was no choice, to the exchange of strange stories, and the history of a life.

I listened so intently, so spellbound, that if I heard, it aroused no curiosity when early in the evening a rustling in the dry grass betrayed a presence near me, and the moonlight shone upon the figure of a man crouching outside the tent, his face pressed against the canvas. It was one of our hunting party. I did not even ask myself which one. Together we watched and waited till the night was dying in the west, and day awaking in the east. Then I noted that he softly crept away; and heard him repeat that word so common in Florence as he went, "*Ecco Mio*." That was all.

Death-silence reigned. I turned. The young prince knelt beside the lifeless body of his father. He unclasped a crucifix that lay upon his breast, and kissing it, repeated the formula, "My God hath willed it so, and His great will be done." Then he hung it about his own neck, kissed the cold forehead, covered the face, and went out alone toward the rising sun.

No one saw him again till at night, when the coolies digged a grave, and we gathered about it. He was there. No priest nor bishop of any creed, nor consecrated ground had we, but we bowed our heads and silently buried him, with the black jungle for his monument. Wrapped in his Eastern robes and turban, he rested quietly after the swift vicissitudes of three-score years and four. Softly and solemnly the

wind wailed the funeral dirge as we threw the earth back again over the uncoffined corpse, giving the ashes to ashes and the dust to dust. Five of us mourners were human, and one, more bereft than any, a chief mourner, without a motion save each long-drawn breath, with head stretched pleading forward, the coal-black Arab, who loved him as Black Auster loved his Roman master. When the work was done, and the last clod replaced, the moonlight floated softly, silvery, over the plain from the far horizon, and lingered on the mound as we stood in a silent circle about it, the great black head thrust over our shoulders, waiting — waiting for the minister to say "Amen."

Suddenly the horse gave a piercing cry, and turning away, left us all forever. We sought in vain for him afterward.

And still we stood about the mound. Was not the service ended? Not quite.

Some one moved. Instinctively I felt that it was he of our party who had lain outside the tent all night.

Slowly he stepped into the midst of the circle and knelt upon the mound, muttering, "*Ecco Mio*," as he touched the earth. He lifted a wan, haggard face, not to any of us about him, but to something beyond that which our eyes saw, and exclaimed with muffled eagerness: "Oh, everlasting almost, end here in one success! I have sown the wind, and reaped the whirlwind. I have fought without conquering. This is the only sacrifice that it is left for Albrecht von Bremen to offer to one whom he worse than murdered. Here where our bodies do almost meet, farewell forever, Prince Victor von Meerschaum!" The moon fell full on his upturned face, the silver in his hair

caught the soft light and held it upon his uncovered head, his eyes shone as if looking at victory. It was a savage victory — it was a dagger that gleamed in his hand, and fell like lightning buried in his breast.

There they lie, together. Lost! forgotten! And what's in a life and a name, and a history now, be it better or worse, murdered or murderer, to the Prince von Meerschaum, or the Dane von Bremen, all alone in that wild, forsaken plain in India?

Nothing indeed! nothing, if they are always to lie there. But if by chance Count Olendorff were right, and there come another reaping-time, at which from a name and a life and a history, they, and you and I in the same fashion, must reap another harvest, upon the quality of which, be it good or bad, we must subsist forever and ever, then it becomes of importance to them, after all, and will not be lost and forgotten, but laid away somewhere to witness in that day — what? And I cannot help repeating that text so mysteriously and appropriately given, before the sermon was preached to me, as I sit of a cool evening watching, in the fire, figure after figure playing a part, and thinking of the two lives, so different, so imperfect, unjustified, and uncondemned, yet punished and rewarded, working so untiringly against each other, yet in the end bringing about, in spite of their intentions, precisely the same result. There is something deeper than chance in it all. There is something surer than luck. There must be a Ruler in the incomprehensible Infinite, transcending our knowledge, who "helpeth them to right that suffer wrong," who "feedeth the hungry," who "helpeth them that are fallen, and as for the way of the ungodly (who) turneth it upside down."

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